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Fact Check: Undocumented Immigrants Don't

Take Jobs From American Workers

by [Alex DiBranco](#) May 24, 2010 01:59 PM (PT) Topics: [Immigrants and the Economy](#)

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Towards the top of the nativist myth list is the whopper that undocumented immigrants are harming American workers. So how does this allegation hold up against the piercing gaze of FactCheck.org, a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, which asked the burning question, "[Does Immigration Cost Jobs](#)"? Sorry, nativists, but the verdict is "not guilty."

With the unemployment rate up at 10%, it's natural that people would look for somebody to blame. Unfortunately, undocumented immigrants seem to make easier targets than big banks engaging in risky business.

"At first glance, this argument makes sense. America's only got so many positions available. If an immigrant takes one, that's one less for a native-born worker, right?" Charlotte Hill [writes on Poverty in America](#). Not so fast. "The economy isn't a stagnant, fixed pie," she continues. "Immigrants don't simply drain our economy of jobs and resources; they also increase demand for existing supply chains, creating new jobs and boosting labor wages in the process. Overall, immigrants — [even the undocumented ones](#) — are [good for the U.S. economy](#)."

Viveca Novak sums up the analysis for FactCheck.org: "There may be other reasons for an overhaul of current immigration policy. But the idea that foreign-born workers are stealing American jobs should be turned back at the border."

Whether or not immigrants are legally in the U.S., study after study finds that they do not take jobs from American workers and actually help the economy. The nonpartisan [Migration Policy Institute](#), the libertarian [Cato Institute](#), the liberal [Economic Policy Institute](#), and the White House under Republican President George W. Bush might not agree on everything, but can find common ground on this. David Griswold of the Cato Institute writes, "The addition of low-skilled immigrants expands the size of the overall economy, creating higher-wage openings for managers, craftsmen, accountants, and the like. The net result is a greater financial reward and relatively more opportunities for those Americans who finish high school."

There is generally one qualification to this net positive impact of immigrants: the lowest-paid American workers without a high school education can see a slight decrease in wages, even though the overall impact for workers is positive and the economy will see long-term growth. My reaction to this? This is America. We should be perfectly capable of making sure every single American gets [at least a high school education](#).

As Hill writes on Poverty in America, "Let's focus on the real problem — our ever-poorer high school dropouts — instead of blaming immigrants for an unemployment rate that's simply not their fault." There are better ways (job training, wage protections, social services) to support the lowest-paid members of society than cutting off immigration and harming the majority of American workers and the economy. Legalizing undocumented immigrants would also allow them to participate in collective bargaining to the benefit of their fellow workers, and protect against potential exploitation by employers. There are certainly better ways of coping with a recession and the problem of unemployment than scapegoating immigrants in a way that just doesn't stand up to a fact check.

Photo credit: [deanmeyersnet](#)



[Alex DiBranco](#) is a Change.org Editor who has worked for the Nation, Political Research Associates, and the Center for American Progress. She is now based in New York City.

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May 24, 2010 @ 03:20PM PT

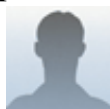
[Kurt Thialfad](#)

I got a proposal. Remove all the undocumented immigrants from the country, and see if the unemployment rate goes down? Then remove the legal visa workers and see if that has an effect. Your theory is interesting, but nobody believes it. There is only was to prove/disprove it.

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May 24, 2010 @ 04:53PM PT

[Ted Clayton](#)

"Nobody believes it"

People in the lower classes - there's a lot of us, and we are growing fast - know that if illegals are available to employers in our area, and they hire them, then those jobs become defined as 'immigrant jobs', and will no longer support a person, say, renting a cheap trailer to live in, and trying to pay mandatory insurance on an old beater pickup to use for work, etc.

Fact Check: Illegal aliens damage the employment scene for lower-class American citizens.

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May 24, 2010 @ 03:58PM PT

[Sam Luedde](#)

One thing I didn't hear in this article is how illegal immigrants have no rights under our law and therefore are mistreated by the corporations they work for (or should I say enslaved by). I keep asking people this question and no one seems to answer me, are illegal immigrants even better off here, when considering they have no protection under our labor laws? So many people seem to support them coming here to improve their lives but everything that I have seen from reports, documentaries, and personal accounts are that although some benefit a large portion are abused, neglected and forced into squallier just to keep a job that pays them poorly. That to me sounds like slavery, and whether or not the country benefits is irrelevant to me if a large portion of people are forced into slavery. Personally it scares me that on one side Americans want to imprison immigrants and the other seems to support their seduction into slavery.

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May 24, 2010 @ 06:54PM PT

[Kurt Thialfad](#)

Yeah, Sam, Alex is using the "big lie" technique, but I'm not buying it either. It's like telling us that water

flows uphill. Maybe you believe illegal workers are good for our country, Alex, but Sam and I don't buy it.

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May 24, 2010 @ 07:10PM PT

[Sarah D](#)

They're still breaking the law and taking money from the American economy.

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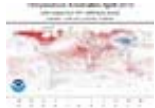
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