

Gauging Attitudes toward Immigrants

Pre-Session Questionnaire Answers

1. **False.** Most immigrants come to the United States legally. Of those in the country without proper authorization, just over half came on some type of temporary visa and overstayed their authorized time period. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2005, the foreign-born population in the U.S. was 34 million. An estimate of the undocumented population that year was between 10 and 12 million, less than half of whom crossed the border illegally.
2. **False.** During the decade between 1995 and 2005, the government investment in border security, including for the construction of fences and detection devices, grew more than tenfold. Yet, during this same period the number of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. doubled. When there exists on one side of the border desperate people in need of work and on the other side an economy that demands foreign labor, no border enforcement regime alone can prevent illegal entries. What is more likely to result from a strategy that simply attempts to seal the borders, without addressing other aspects of the immigration system, is more organized crime involvement in clandestine crossings and more deaths of migrants making desperate and dangerous attempts at crossings.
3. **False.** Immigrants, even those without proper immigration status in the country, pay taxes – sales taxes, property taxes, income taxes, Social Security deductions, government license and permit fees, gasoline and beverage taxes, etc. The National Research Council reports that on an individual basis, immigrants contribute about \$80,000 more in taxes than they receive in public benefits over a life time.
4. **False.** According to the Independent Institute and a number of prominent economists, immigrants are a net gain for the U.S. economy. They fill labor demands in critical sectors of the economy; they contribute in taxes and Social Security investments at rates greater than they use in services; and they generate jobs in the American economy through the creation of small businesses at a far greater level than native-born Americans.
5. **True, but...**The 34 million people in the U.S. who are foreign-born (in 2005) represent the largest number of immigrants in our nation's history. However, as a proportion of the total U.S. population, today's immigrants are about 12%, whereas in 1910, the proportion of foreign-born of the U.S. population was 15%. Thus, today we are less a nation of immigrants than we were 100 years ago.
6. **False.** Of the more than 40 million Latinos in the United States, about 75% were born in this country.
7. **False.** Under current U.S. laws, people here without proper immigration authority have committed a civil offense, rather than having committed a criminal activity. Moreover, immigrants are less likely to commit a crime in the U.S. than are the native-born. According to the Migration Policy Institute, the rate of incarceration of foreign-born individuals (.68% of total foreign-born are in jails) is well below that of native-born ones (3.51%).
8. **True.** A principle found in Catholic Social Teaching holds that sovereign nations have the right and responsibility to control their borders in order to serve the common good. Countries that have more wealth have a higher degree of responsibility for welcoming immigrants than do poorer nations.