

All the responses below are from <https://www.cato.org/blog/common-arguments-against-immigration> (with moderate editing)
Cato is a right-leaning libertarian think-tank, so this seemed a good source to use for those who express the following concerns:

“It’s easy to immigrate to America and we’re the most open country in the world.”

- It is *very difficult to immigrate* to the United States. Ellis Island closed down a long time ago. In most cases, there isn’t a line and when there is, it can take decades or [centuries](#). America allows greater numbers of immigrants than any other country. However, the *annual flow of immigrants as a percent of our population is below most other OECD countries* because the United States is so large. The *percentage of our population that is foreign-born is about 13 percent – [below historical highs](#) in the United States and less than half of what it is in modern New Zealand and Australia*. America is great at assimilating immigrants but other countries are [much more open](#).

“Immigrants pose a unique risk today because of terrorism.”

Terrorism is not a [modern](#) strategy. There were a [large number](#) of bombings and terrorist attacks in the early 20th century, most of them committed by immigrants, socialists, and their fellow travelers.

- The *annual chance of an American being killed in a terrorist attack committed on U.S. soil by a refugee was [one in 3.6 billion](#) from 1975 to 2015*.
- For all foreign-born terrorists on U.S. soil, the annual chance of being murdered in a terrorist attack is one in 3.6 million during the same period of time.
- Almost 99 percent of those murders occurred on 9/11 and were committed by *foreigners on tourist visas and one student visa, not immigrants*.

What about refugees and danger?

- Why would ISIS be smart enough to pose as refugees, yet not smart enough to pose as Christian refugees?
- [Less than 1% of refugees worldwide end up being recommended for settlement](#). They are vetted by the UN, the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, USCIS fraud detection, and national security directors (and Syrians get an extra layer of screening called the "Syrian enhanced review"). The process takes between 18 to 24 months on average.
- The elaborate federal process aside, there's the [moral argument](#): the refugees are fleeing ISIS, our common enemy—doesn’t it seem an offense to the basic tenets of [insert your relative's religion here] and common decency to bar them from the U.S.? Certainly America is strong enough to stick to its pro-immigrant heritage in the face of a few terrorists, right?

“Immigrants will take our jobs and lower our wages, especially hurting the poor.”

This common argument has *the greatest amount of evidence rebutting it*.

- First, the [displacement effect](#) is [small](#) if it even affects natives at all.
- Immigrants are *typically attracted to growing regions* and they increase the supply and demand sides of the economy once they are there, expanding employment opportunities.
- The debate over immigrant impacts on American wages is confined to the [lower single digits](#) – *immigrants may increase the relative wages for some Americans by a tiny amount and decrease them by a larger amount for the few Americans who directly compete against them*.
- *Immigrants likely compete most directly against other immigrants* so the effects on less-skilled native-born Americans might be [very small or even positive](#).

“Immigrants are a net fiscal cost.”

- Related to the welfare argument is that immigrants consume more in government benefits than they generate in tax revenue. The empirics on this are fairly consistent – *immigrants in the United States have a net-zero impact on government budgets*.

It seems odd that poor immigrants don't create a larger deficit but there are many factors pushing explaining that.

- *higher immigrant fertility and the long run productivity of those people born in the United States generates a lot of tax revenue.*
- *immigrants grow the economy considerably* (this is different from the immigration surplus discussed above) and *increase tax revenue.*
- *many immigrants come when they are young but not young enough to consume public schools, thus they work and pay taxes before consuming [hundreds of thousands](#) of dollars in public schools costs and welfare benefits – meaning they give an immediate fiscal boost.*
There are many [other reasons](#) as well.

Although the tax incidence from immigrants is what matters for the fiscal consequences, *between [50 percent](#) and [75 percent](#) of undocumented immigrants comply with federal tax law*. States that rely on consumption or property taxes tend to garner a surplus from taxes paid by unlawful immigrants while those that rely on income taxes do not.

“Immigrants are especially crime prone.”

- This myth has been around for [over a century](#).
- Immigrants are *less likely to be incarcerated for violent and property crimes and cities with more immigrants and their descendants are more peaceful*. Some immigrants do commit violent and property crimes but, on the whole, they are less likely to do so.

“Immigrants abuse the welfare state.”

- Most legal immigrants do not have access to means-tested welfare for their first five years here with few exceptions
- Unauthorized immigrants don’t have access at all – except for emergency Medicaid.
- Immigrants are [less likely to use means-tested welfare benefits that similar native-born Americans](#). When they do use welfare, the dollar value of benefits consumed is *smaller*.
- If poor native-born Americans used Medicaid at the same rate and consumed the same value of benefits as poor immigrants, *the program would be 42 percent smaller*.
- Immigrants also *make large net contributions* to [Medicare](#) and [Social Security](#), the largest portions of the welfare state, because of *their ages, ineligibility, and their greater likelihood of retiring in other countries*. Far from draining the welfare state, immigrants have given the entitlement portions a few more years of operation before bankruptcy. If you’re still worried about immigrant use of the welfare state, as I am, then it is far easier and cheaper to [build a higher wall around the welfare state, instead of around the country](#).

“Today’s immigrants don’t assimilate like previous immigrant groups did.”

- *immigrants are assimilating as well as or better than previous immigrant groups – even [Mexicans](#)*.

The first piece of research is the National Academy of Science’s (NAS) September 2015 book titled [The Integration of Immigrants into American Society](#). Bottom line: *Assimilation is never perfect and always takes time, but it’s going very well*.

The second book is a July 2015 book titled [Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015](#) finds *more problems with immigrant assimilation in Europe, especially for those from outside of the European Union, but the findings for the United States are quite positive*.

The third work by University of Washington economist Jacob Vigdor compares modern immigrant civic and cultural assimilation to that of immigrants from the early 20th century. It notes:

“While there are reasons to think of contemporary migration from Spanish-speaking nations as distinct from earlier waves of immigration, *evidence does not support the notion that this wave of migration poses a true threat to the institutions that withstood those earlier waves.* Basic indicators of assimilation, from naturalization to English ability, are *if anything stronger now than they were a century ago.*”

Note, too: For the nostalgic among us who believe that immigrants assimilated so much more smoothly in the past, the plethora of ethnic and [anti-Catholic riots](#), the nativist [Know-Nothing movement](#), and [immigrant groups that refused to assimilate](#) are a useful tonic. Immigrant assimilation is always messy and it looks bad from the middle of that process where we are right now, but the trends are positive and pointing in the right direction. **“Immigrants will increase crowding, harm the environment, and [insert misanthropic statement here].”**

Concern about crowding is focused on publicly provided goods or services – like schools, roads, and heavily zoned urban areas. *Private businesses don’t complain about crowding, they expand to meet demand which increases their profits.* The problems of crowding are manageable because *more immigrants also mean a larger tax base.*

“Amnesty/failure to enforce our immigration laws will destroy the Rule of Law in the United States.”

For a law to be consistent with Rule of Law principle, it must be applied equally, have roughly ex ante predictable outcomes based on the circumstances, and be consistent with our Anglo-Saxon traditions of personal autonomy and liberty. Our current immigration laws violate all of those. They are applied differently based on people’s country of birth via arbitrary quotas and other regulations, the outcomes are certainly not predictable, and they are hardly consistent with America’s traditional immigration policy and our conceptions of liberty.

An amnesty is an admission that our past laws have failed, they need reform, and the net cost of enforcing them in the meantime exceeds the benefits.

That’s why there have been [numerous amnesties](#) throughout American history.

Enforcing laws that are inherently capricious and that are contrary to our traditions is inconsistent with a stable Rule of Law that is a *necessary, although not sufficient, precondition for economic growth.* Enforcing bad laws poorly is better than enforcing bad laws uniformly. *In immigration, liberalization is the best choice of all. Admitting our laws failed, granting an amnesty for law-breakers, and reforming the laws does not doom the Rule of Law in the United States – it strengthens it.*

“Immigrants won’t vote for the Republican Party/will all vote Democratic – look at what happened to California.”

This is an argument used by some Republicans to oppose liberalized immigration. They point to California as an example of what happens when there are too many immigrants and their descendants: Democratic control. [The evidence is clear that Hispanic and immigrant voters in California in the early to mid-1990s did turn the state blue but that was a reaction to the state GOP declaring political war on them.](#) Those who claim

that changing demographics due to immigration is solely responsible for the shift in California's politics have to explain the severe drop-off in support for the GOP at exactly the same time that the party was using anti-immigration propositions and arguments to win the 1994 election. They would further have to why *Texas Hispanics are so much more Republican than those in California*. [Nativism has never been the path toward national party success and frequently contributes to their downfall](#). In other words, whether immigrants vote for Republicans is mostly up to how Republicans treat them.

Locking people out of the United States because they might disproportionality vote for one of the two major parties is not a legitimate use of government power.

These last two are unlikely to be “talking points,” but I think are important concepts and may well help in a longer, reasonable discussion:

“National sovereignty.”

By not exercising control over borders through actively blocking immigrants, the users of this argument warn, the government will surrender a vital component of its [national sovereignty](#). *Rarely do users of this argument explain to whom the U.S. government would actually surrender sovereignty!* Even in the most extremely open immigration policy imaginable - total open borders - national sovereignty is not diminished assuming that our government's institutions chose such a policy. How can that be? The standard definition of a government is

an institution that has a monopoly (or near monopoly) on the legitimate use of violence within a certain geographical area. The way it achieves this monopoly is by keeping out other competing sovereigns that want that monopoly.

Our government maintains its sovereignty by excluding the militaries of other nations and by stopping insurgents.

However, U.S. immigration laws are not primarily designed or intended to keep out foreign armies, spies, or insurgents. *The main effect of our immigration laws is to keep out willing foreign workers from selling their labor to voluntary American purchasers.*

Such economic controls do not aid in the maintenance of national sovereignty and relaxing or removing them would not infringe upon the government's national sovereignty any more than a policy of unilateral free trade would. If the United States would return to its 1790-1875 immigration policy, foreign militaries crossing U.S. borders would be countered by the U.S. military. *Allowing the free flow of non-violent and healthy foreign nationals does nothing to diminish the U.S. government's legitimate monopoly on the use of force.*

There is also a *historical argument that free immigration and U.S. national sovereignty are not in conflict*. From 1790-1875 the federal government placed almost no restrictions on immigration. At the time, states imposed restrictions on the immigration of free blacks and likely indigents through outright bars, taxes, passenger regulations, and bonds. Many of those restrictions weren't enforced by state governments and were lifted in the 1840s after Supreme Court decisions. However, that open immigration policy did not stop the United States from fighting two wars against foreign powers and the Civil War. *The U.S. government's monopoly on the legitimate use of force during that time was certainly challenged from within and without but the U.S. government maintained its national sovereignty even with near open borders.*

The U.S. government was also clearly sovereign during that period of history. Those who claim the U.S. government would lose its national sovereignty under a regime of free immigration have yet to reconcile that with America's past of doing just that. *We do not have to choose between free immigration and U.S. national sovereignty.*

Furthermore, *national sovereign control over immigrations means that the government can do whatever it wants with that power – including relinquishing it entirely.* It would be odd to argue that sovereign states have complete control over their border except they can't open them too much. Of course, they can – that is the essence of sovereignty. After all, I'm arguing that the United States government should change its laws to allow for more legal immigration, not that the U.S. government should cede all of its power to a foreign sovereign.

“Immigrants bring with them their bad cultures/ideas/etc that will undermine and destroy our economic and political institutions. The resultant weakening in economic growth means that immigrants will destroy more wealth than create.”

This is the most intelligent anti-immigration argument and the one [most likely to be correct](#), although the evidence currently doesn't support it being true. Empirical evidence doesn't point to this effect. Recent research compared “economic freedom” scores with immigrant populations across 100 countries over 21 years. Some countries were majority immigrant while some had virtually none. Results showed that

- *the larger a country's immigrant population was in 1990, the more economic freedom increased by 2011. The immigrant's country of origin, and whether they came from a poor nation or a rich one, didn't affect the outcome.*
- These results held for the United States federal government but not for state governments.
- The national increase in economic freedom more than outweighed a small decrease in economic freedom in states with more immigrants.
- *Large immigrant populations also don't increase the size of welfare programs or other public programs across [American states](#) .*

Although this anti-immigration argument could be true, it seems unlikely to be so for several reasons.

- It is *hard to upend established political and economic institutions through immigration. Immigrants change to fit into the existing order rather than vice versa.* Institutions are ontologically collective; it would take a rapid inundation of immigrants & replacement of natives to change institutions.
- *Immigrant self-selection:* Those who decide to come here mostly admire American institutions or have policy opinions that are very similar to those of native-born Americans. As a result, adding more immigrants who already broadly share the opinions of most Americans would not affect policy. [This appears to be the case in the United States.](#)

- *Foreigners and Americans have very [similar policy opinions](#). This hypothesis is related to those above, but it indicates an area where Americans may be unexceptional compared to the rest of the world.*

Even Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels thought that the *prospects for working class revolution in the United States were diminished due to the varied immigrant origins of the workers* who were divided by a high degree of ethnic, sectarian, and racial diversity. That *immigrant-led diversity may be why the United States never had a popular workers, labor, or socialist party*.

“The brain drain of smart immigrants to the United State impoverished other countries.”

- *The empirical evidence on this point is conclusive: The flow of skilled workers from low-productivity countries to high-productivity nations increases the incomes of people in the destination country, enriches the immigrant, and helps (or at least doesn't hurt) those left behind.*
- *Remittances that immigrants send home are often large enough to offset any loss in home country productivity by emigration. In the long run, the potential to immigrate and the higher returns from education increase the incentive for workers in the Developing World to acquire skills that they otherwise might not – increasing the quantity of human capital.*