

GRACE-FILLED CONVERSATIONS

Debunking the Myths

1. Do undocumented immigrants commit more crimes?

False narratives about immigrants bringing crime to the United States are not new and have been exacerbated by claims that recent immigration enforcement efforts are focused on “the worst of the worst.” But the data is clear: noncriminals are increasingly being detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). People without any criminal record now make up the largest population in immigration detention.

Welcoming immigrants into American communities can actually strengthen public safety. In fact, immigrants—including those without legal status—are less likely to commit crimes than their U.S.-born counterparts.

- Data from 1980 to 2022 shows that as the immigrant share of the U.S. population grew—from 6.2% to 13.9%—the crime rate declined by 60.4%. The violent crime rate fell by 34.5%, and the property crime rate fell by 63.3%.
- Nineteen separate research reports published between 2017 and 2024 have found that the portion of immigrants in an area did not impact either the violent crime or property crime rate in that area. Increased shares of immigrants were actually associated with lower violent or property crime rates.
- Despite President Trump claiming that immigration enforcement is focused on going after “the worst of the worst,” government data show that the majority of people detained by ICE have no criminal convictions. Read more: Debunking the Myth of Immigrants and Crime.

2. Can undocumented immigrants vote?

Increasingly, politicians are changing voting systems under the guise of stopping noncitizens from voting. There is no evidence, however, that noncitizens are voting in any significant way at all.

- A database from the Heritage Foundation going back to the 1980s identifies 1,546 cases of alleged voter fraud. Only 68 cases pertain to noncitizens. Despite significant efforts to document noncitizen voting, proven incidents of noncitizen voting over a 40-year period were below 0.0001%.
- Most cases of noncitizen voting involve lawful permanent residents—many who ended up voting due to bad information, being encouraged to vote by a government official, or being falsely told they were eligible to vote.
- Read more: Unpacking Myths About Noncitizen Voting — How Heritage Foundation’s Own Data Proves It’s Not a Problem.

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3. Do undocumented immigrants pay taxes?

The value of immigrants to the U.S. economy is under increased scrutiny, especially regarding their tax contributions. This is despite immigrant households—including undocumented immigrant households—contributing billions of dollars in federal, state, and local level taxes each year.

- Although they cannot access many taxpayer-funded programs and services, undocumented immigrants make significant contributions to the U.S. tax system by paying sales, income, and property taxes.
- In 2023, immigrant households paid a total of \$651.9 billion in taxes. They also contributed \$215.8 billion to Social Security and \$58.7 billion to Medicare. Undocumented households paid \$55.8 billion in taxes and had a combined spending power of \$299.0 billion.
- Read more: The Council's interactive data tool, Map the Impact, provides information about the economic and demographic contributions of immigrants at the federal, state, and local levels.

4. Can undocumented immigrants get Medicaid and SNAP?

Who qualifies for specific federal public benefits can be complicated. Complex eligibility rules and political rhetoric have fueled confusion and misinformation. The passage of President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act has further muddied the waters, but the truth about immigrants and public benefits is simpler.

- Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for federally funded programs like Medicaid, Medicare, or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). They do not receive Social Security benefits (despite paying into the program), cannot purchase healthcare coverage through the Affordable Care Act Marketplace, and are ineligible for SNAP benefits. Undocumented parents can apply for SNAP on behalf of their U.S. citizen children, but benefits can only be calculated based on the number of eligible household members.
- Lawfully present immigrants, including green card holders, can receive some public benefits, but must wait five years before they can apply, with limited exceptions.
- Many immigrants avoid applying for benefits they may otherwise be eligible for due to confusion and fear stemming from a prior "public charge" rule—something the Trump administration is considering bringing back—leading to mixed-status households unenrolling from public benefits for which they are entitled.
- Read more: Can Undocumented Immigrants Get SNAP or Medicaid? The Truth About Federal Benefits and Immigrants Help Fund Our Public Programs.

5. Do immigrants take American jobs?

Immigrants are frequently portrayed as competitors for American jobs. In reality, immigrants are complementary to the U.S.-born workforce. They are job creators, fill labor shortages in key industries like agriculture and healthcare, and are vital to the long-term health of the U.S. economy.

- Despite making up 14.3% of the population in 2023, immigrants made up 17.7% of the U.S. workforce in 2023—filling 26.1% of jobs in the agriculture industry and 25.7% of jobs in the construction industry.
- Immigrants are vital to the U.S. healthcare system. They are twice as likely as U.S.-born individuals to work as home health aides, and twice as likely to work as physicians or surgeons. In 2023, 15.9% of nurses and 28.4% of health aides in the U.S. were foreign-born.
- Millions of American workers are employed at immigrant-founded and immigrant-owned companies. In 2023, 23.6% of entrepreneurs were immigrants, and immigrant-owned businesses had a combined income of \$116.2 billion.
- Read more: Trump's Immigration Actions Are Taking a Toll on Local Economies – Here's What the Data Says So Far.

While this is not an exhaustive list of myths, it highlights the widespread misinformation and confusion surrounding immigrants in the U.S. These myths not only affect our immigrant neighbors but also impact the well-being, safety, and prosperity of all Americans.