

# Tucson Opinion: Dispelling myths about undocumented immigrants

By Richard Brusca and Omar Vidal Special to the Arizona Daily Star Jan 31, 2021 Updated Feb 1, 2021



The "zero tolerance" policy meant that any adult caught crossing the border illegally would be prosecuted for illegal entry. Because children cannot be jailed with their family members, **families were separated** and children were taken into custody by Health and Human Services.

Gregory Bull / The Associated Press 2018



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**T***he following column is the opinion and analysis of the writer:*

A few of our conservative friends are nervous about President Joe Biden's plans for finding pathways to citizenship for some immigrants who still lack legal status. But just who are these undocumented immigrants?

We have researched and written about Latino migrants and the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America, and one of us has also volunteered in migrant shelters and legal clinics. We want to share our understanding of Latino immigrants in the United States.

There are also detailed reports on undocumented immigrants easily procured through the internet from government reports (like the U.S. Budget Office, U.S. Census Bureau, etc.) and from an abundance of scholarly research.

Almost all migrants crossing the southern border come to the U.S. to escape the economic and social perils of their country. They come looking for work and dignity. Some Central American countries, Honduras and Guatemala in particular, are suffering from disastrous economic conditions — brought about in no small measure by a long history of U.S. meddling (from the infamous Banana Wars beginning in 1899 to modern times) — and the crime that poverty begets.

Their families have been broken apart by government repression or organized crime, and they have suffered the traumas of migration and displacement. They arrive in the U.S. with nothing except hope. They are refugees, even though the U.S. may not grant them that official title. You know them. They are your gardeners, your electricians and the cooks in your favorite restaurants. Many are your friends.

Congress and the courts long ago declared that every resident of the U.S. is entitled to essential social services, such as emergency medical care and schooling for their children. This applies to everyone, regardless of color, nationality, gender preference, or religion. It is one of the fundamental human rights that make the U.S. a great and healthy nation.

There is a myth that undocumented immigrants harm the American economy. But, according to the U.S. Congressional Budget Office, the Census Bureau, and abundant research, undocumented immigrants increase the size of the U.S. economy and contribute to its economic growth. They benefit consumers (you, your neighbors) by reducing the prices of goods and services, and they

contribute more in tax revenue than they collect in government services.

Legalization of undocumented immigrants would increase their earnings and consumption, and thus further increase the U.S. gross domestic product.

Undocumented immigrants pay income tax, sales tax, and property tax, just like legal residents do. Between 50% and 75% of them pay individual, Social Security, and Medicare taxes. Plus, the IRS estimates that about 6 million file individual income tax returns each year.

There is also a myth that undocumented immigrants are a burden on the U.S. school systems. Around 2 million of them are school-age children (less than 4% of the 54 million school-age children in the U.S.). Their schooling is paid for through the state and local taxes their parents pay. In some states (like Missouri, New Mexico and Texas), more “school taxes” are collected from undocumented immigrants than are spent to educate their children. According to the Office of the Comptroller of Texas, the state collects \$424 million more in revenue from undocumented immigrants than it spends to provide for education, health care, and law enforcement activities for that population.

The United States is a country of immigrants. It has always been, and it will always be. They came from the United Kingdom and gave birth to this nation. Now, they are from many countries. In 2018, nearly 45 million immigrants lived here; one in seven U.S. residents was foreign born. It has been estimated that, by 2065, about one in three Americans will be an immigrant or have immigrant parents, with Hispanics projected to be 24% of the population. As in the past, the aspirations of all these immigrants will contribute to enriching the American dream.

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