

# **UNITED STATES - Immigration Reform and Illegal Hispanic Population**

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Illegal Hispanic immigration is a significant social problem. The United States must deal with the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants. The Latino or Hispanic population faces poor employment conditions; significant lack of social benefits, such as quality health insurance, education opportunities, housing access, and fair retirement plans; and, ultimately, a tremendous segregation on the basis of invisibility of cultural characteristics and traditions. In other words, this is a situation of discrimination and intolerance. Thereby, this problem has three main dimensions: 1) economic, related to the job market and the financial structure of the U.S. 2) political, in terms of national security and crime control. 3) sociocultural, linked to discrimination, racism, and segregation. A comprehensive approach to immigration reform should keep in mind stakeholders' interests and influences. The analysis could be focused on public stakeholders at the federal level such as the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches, and should pay special attention to interactions among particular political points of view, which have a mirroring in local and state governments. It is necessary to realize that ideological approaches on immigration shape the discussion and, ultimately, determine the decision-making process. Some stakeholders have addressed this problem in comprehensive ways that integrate the contribution of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S.

According to Rodriguez (2013), this "humanitarian approach" conceptualizes immigration reform as a policy that would grant amnesty for undocumented immigrants, including the right to become citizens sometime in the future. On the contrary, opponents of wholesale amnesty view immigration reform in terms of a policy to restrict legalization to only a portion of the undocumented migrant population or to a relative few, arguing that the country has, "already admitted too many immigrants and that it is time to reduce immigration" [1]. They also state the idea that Hispanic immigration would threaten America's economic growth and jeopardize its national values and cultural manners. Hence, they propose an "assimilation of differences" process instead of "integration of immigrants". For instance, the obligation to learn English seems to be more an imposition rather than a socio-cultural improvement of the literacy skills of the Hispanic population.

Economic evidence suggests that immigrant workers increase job opportunities and incomes of Americans. According to the conclusion of a study conducted by David Card (2005), immigrants do not cause any sizeable decrease in wages and employment of U.S.-born citizens; instead they could raise wages (Ottaviano & Peri, 2010). One reason for this effect is that immigrants and US-born workers generally do not compete for the same jobs. Moreover, immigrants expand the U.S. economy's productive capacity, stimulate investment, and promote specialization that in the long run boosts productivity. In terms of securitization of borders and crime control, these issues are linked to discrimination and segregation against illegal Hispanic immigrants, and they represent another gap in the current policy debate. Based on the assumption that immigration threatens national security and increases crime in the U.S. communities where immigrants arrive, specific policies have been adopted to create barriers to new immigrants, mainly Hispanics.

These policies have contributed to the significant growth in the unauthorized population in the United States, by inadvertently encouraging the permanent settlement and family reunification of immigrants who arrived illegally. Thus, the barriers may be fencing more unauthorized immigrants into the country than keeping them out. Based on the fact that Hispanics are the most significant immigrant group,

authorities passed several immigration reforms in order to resolve a problem that seems to be intrinsically related to crime, violence, smuggling, and the illegal entry of people. There exists an assumption that immigrants face acculturation and assimilation problems that most natives do not. Thus, immigrants tend to settle in “disorganized neighborhoods characterized by structural characteristics often associated with crime situations, such as widespread poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and a preponderance of young males” [2]. Therefore, immigrants seem to be involved in crime to a greater proportion than native-born Americans. However, empirical studies have found that immigrants are typically underrepresented in criminal statistics. According to Martinez & Lee (2000), crime rates among immigrants seem to be related to differences in structural conditions across urban areas where immigrants settle rather than to the cultural traditions of a particular immigrant group. As these authors explain, “local context is a central influence shaping the criminal involvement of both immigrants and natives, but in many cases, compared with native groups, immigrants seem better able to withstand crime-facilitating conditions than native groups” [3].

Illegal Hispanic immigrants face racism and segregation because they face a social disintegration process, which implies a breakdown of community social institutions that result from social change. Inexact evidence has led to a misunderstanding of immigration, in terms of its impact on the job-market securitization, border security, and crime control, which contribute to discrimination and segregation, and prevent the U.S from taking advantage of the diversity that could increase its competitiveness in the current world context.

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## References

1. Card, D. (2005). Is the immigration really so bad? Department of Economics. UC Berkeley.
2. Martinez, R & Lee, M. (2000). On immigration and crime. *The nature of crime: continuity and change.* (1) 485-524
3. Ottaviano, G. & Peri, G. (2010). Rethinking the effect of immigration on wages.
4. Rodriguez, N. (2013). Immigration reform. *Contexts* (12) 10, 10-11.
5. The White House. (2006). Building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Immigrations System.

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## Notas

[1] Rodriguez, 2013, p. 10

[2] Martinez & Lee, 2000, p. 485

[3] Martinez & Lee, 2000, p. 486