

THE FACTS: IMMIGRANTS IN URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES (NATIONAL)



IMMIGRANTS DO NOT CAUSE INCREASES IN CRIME.

Contrary to the stereotypes perpetuated by the media,¹ research indicates that higher levels of immigrants have either no effect on crime or are associated with lower levels of crime and violence.² In fact, the incarceration rate of those born in the U.S. (3.51%) is four times higher than that of the foreign-born (1.86%).³ Non-Hispanic White natives are twice as likely to be incarcerated as first-generation immigrants.⁴ An influx of new immigrants to high-crime communities may actually transform and revitalize disadvantaged neighborhoods.⁵ Unfortunately, incarceration rates rise dramatically for second-generation immigrants,⁶ indicating that assimilation to American culture is not always positive.

IMMIGRANTS ARE REVITALIZING METROPOLITAN AREAS NATIONWIDE.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that “the foreign-born population is more concentrated than the native-born population in metropolitan areas and in their central cities”.⁷ U.S. Census figures also indicate that without new immigrants, many metropolitan areas would have lost population in the 1990s, seriously impacting labor, new businesses, and the tax-base.⁸ Immigrants to Chicago during the 1990s were instrumental in reversing four decades of population loss,⁹ and they made up 93.8% of the net growth in the labor force in Chicago.¹⁰

Increasingly, however, immigrants and other minorities are populating the suburbs of nation’s largest urban centers, making up 27.3% of the suburban population, an 8% increase from 1990.¹¹ In fact, in the nation’s largest metro areas, the rate of immigrant population growth was 42% higher in the suburbs than in the central city.¹² The suburbanization of immigrants is especially evident in the Atlanta, Dallas and Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas.¹³

IMMIGRANTS ARE ESSENTIAL IN RURAL COMMUNITIES WHERE THE POPULATION IS AGING AND IN DECLINE.

Between 2000 and 2004, immigration accounted for 31% of population increase in rural areas, often stemming population losses.¹⁴ Immigrants tend to be young and contribute their energy to their new communities that are losing many of their own young people.¹⁵ Minnesota as a whole has an aging population, but this is especially true in rural Minnesota. For example, young adults are leaving rural Minnesota due to limited employment, housing, and higher educational and social opportunities. In fact, five times as many college graduates moved to the Twin Cities metro area from Greater Minnesota as did the reverse.¹⁶ Recently the foreign born population in many rural communities in the Midwest exceeds 5%. Employment in meatpacking and food-processing plants is attracting many Hispanics to these communities.¹⁷ Southwest Missouri’s Hispanic population has increased by 284% in the last decade.¹⁸ The Hispanic population for Nebraska increased by 165%, minimizing population loss to the state.¹⁹ Beyond the Midwest, Central North Carolina and northern Georgia have also gained significant percentages of immigrants to rural communities.²⁰

COMMUNITIES WITH FOOD PROCESSING PLANTS BENEFIT FROM IMMIGRATION.

The food processing industry has grown into a multi-billion dollar business and has expanded dramatically in the Midwest. Latino, Asian and African immigrants are attracted to jobs in food processing because they do not require high-level skills or English proficiency.²¹ Communities with large food processing plants have benefited from population and school district stabilization or growth due to the influx of immigrant workers and their families.²² Drops in enrollment affect school funding and lead to consolidations.²³ The influx of immigrants and their children to a school system can shore up school enrollment. In the Minnesota River Valley, Latino enrollment grew by 600% from 1985-2001. Not only have school closures and consolidations been averted there, but Latino students have added 8 million dollars to the budgets of that region’s school districts.²⁴

IMMIGRATION HAS DRIVEN THE GROWTH IN THE HOUSING MARKET AND IS LINKED TO RISING PROPERTY VALUES.

A study carried out over an 18-year period in Washington D.C. revealed a positive correlation between the number of immigrants in a neighborhood and increasing property values.²⁵ The housing market has also been bolstered by new immigrants who account for more than 1/3 of the household growth this decade and are expected to contribute even more in the future.²⁶ From 1998-2001, immigrants purchased about 8% of new homes and 11% of existing homes sold.²⁷ Van Davis, the president and chief executive of Century 21 Real Estate, predicts that the “gigantic growth of the Hispanic population – both from immigration and birthrate – will be the most significant factor in the first-time home market during the next decade”.²⁸ In 2000, immigrants made up 12% of the first-time home buyers.²⁹ Undocumented immigrants have low rates of homeownership, due to their legal status and economic characteristics. However, if the market were more accessible to them, there are an estimated 216,000 potential homeowners among Latino undocumented households.³⁰

“Regions that look on minority populations as an economic opportunity, not a problem, will thrive.”

-Minnesota Planning Director Dean Barkley³¹



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SOURCES FOR “IMMIGRATION AND RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES”

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