

Activated Knowledge/Ignorance or Inert Information —case of immigration, sample 2

Step 1: Topic and its significance

I will be researching and discussing immigration in the United States. I think this issue is important mostly because immigration policies affect the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. The largest effect is on the immigrants themselves, of course, but immigration also impacts other residents of the countries they leave and the countries they enter, documented or undocumented. From a more theoretical and philosophical perspective, how the world treats migrants and refugees, or stateless people in general, is of crucial importance because it demonstrates how the world values (or fails to value) humans as *humans*, rather than as citizens belonging to a state. Furthermore, I believe the issue is of increasing importance in light of the recent refugee crisis in Europe and increased Latin American-US immigration. Furthermore, in an increasingly globalized world with a heightened awareness of inequality, the morality of borders (although I do not think they'll be going away anytime soon) and who should bear the cost of dealing with international issues may be increasingly debated and called into question. For the sake of focus, I will write and research here on the topic of current American immigration and immigrants, and especially their effects on the US economy.

I think that no one decides to leave their home country (except in the relatively few cases of people who received higher education in the US and/or got a job here afterwards) without an very compelling reason, i.e. fleeing violence, persecution, or extreme economic hardship. I think that immigrants, including unskilled laborers, actually benefit the American economy overall even if a subset of the population, such as Americans who have only graduated from or not even graduated from high school, may lose out because of increased competition for jobs. I think the fear of terrorism and crime associated with increased immigration is baseless at best and self-fulfilling at worst, since poverty and discrimination lead to those results. I also suspect that most Americans would overestimate the number of immigrants in the country and their effect, positive or negative, on the economy/life in general. I think the approach we should take as a nation to addressing this issue is a balance between the humanitarian considerations of migrants and the welfare considerations of US citizens, keeping in mind that refusing someone asylum or citizenship, or deporting someone, likely has larger negative effects for that person than admitting them would on the US populace. I would guess that about 10% of Americans are immigrants, that most immigrants live in California and the southwest despite a concentration of xenophobic sentiment in the midwest, that immigrants do in fact pay their taxes, that increased border control funding does not work, and that immigrants are not a drain on government funding.

Step 2: Research methods

I began by searching for “US immigration statistics,” which led me to the Migration Policy Institute’s (MPI) *Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States* page. I decided that this source was legitimate and credible because its information and data come from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) statistics, and was updated in May of 2016. I also ended up visiting a few other pages on the MPI domain.

Next, I searched “What are main causes of immigration to the US?” This pulled up the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops “Justice for Immigrants” site. Although I normally might be wary of using religiously affiliated sources, I think that religion has little to say specifically on the matter of immigration, so I doubted it would be biased in that respect; additionally, the sources the article cited seemed credible, including the *Washington State Department of Enterprise Services*, *US Citizenship and Immigration Services*, *Council of Foreign Relations*, *Social Science Quarterly*, and more.

Then I searched for “causes of immigration to the us,” which was slightly less successful; I scrolled past many sites that appeared to be mainly curriculum resources for high school teachers, some articles and blog posts focused on immigration in the 1800s and early 1900s, Wikipedia pages, and finally came across the Center for American Progress site. I believe this source to be credible not only based on its name (i.e., my previous knowledge of it) and the site’s professional layout, but once again due to the numerous sources cited below the article; these included the American Immigration Council, the Washington National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Washington Pew Research Center, the Office of Immigration Statistics, and many more.

I next Googled “Do illegal immigrants pay taxes?” I thought I might have produced slightly more right-leaning results by using the term “illegal,” but in fact my first result was a Bipartisan Policy Center article. I hold slightly less confidence in this website, largely because, unlike the other sources I looked at, the large majority of its text was not footnoted with citations. However, they did include a helpful table whose source was the Congressional Budget Office and the US Department of Health and Human Services; this, combined with the professional writing style, presentation, and a google search of the author revealing she is an assistant editor on the Council of Foreign Relations, increased my confidence.

My next search term, “impact of immigration on the US economy,” led me to the Brookings Institution report, which I hold to be credible on name value; I am familiar with this public policy think tank, and it is not only famous and well-regarded but it is non-profit and independent and also I believe generally considered to be non-partisan/centrist/liberal-leaning.

I then searched “How should we regulate immigration?” which gave me articles from the American Bar Association, *The New York Times*, and a large number of pages about state and local versus federal immigration regulation; it was not a fruitful search overall, and I did not use any of the sources it produced.

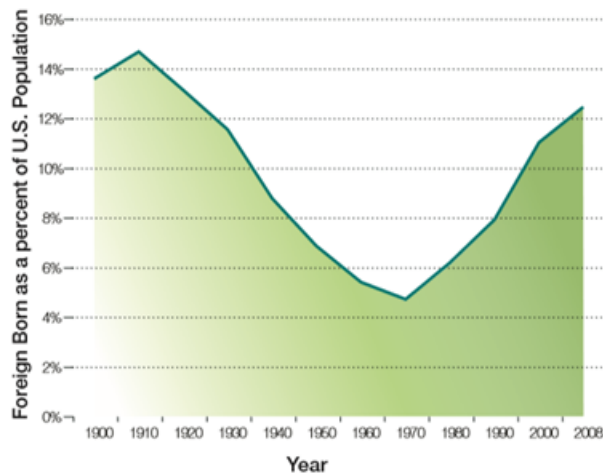
Finally, I Googled “Does increased border control work?” and found the Center for Migration Studies website, which I believe to be credible based on the appearance of the site, its data collection, and its statement at the bottom of each page: “CMS is a member of the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN), a global network of 270+ entities that provide services to migrants, including shelters and welcoming centers in receiving communities. CMS is also a member of the Scalabrini Migration Study Centers, a network of think-tanks on international migration and refugee protection.”

Step 3: summarize the main results of the research

Of course you do not have to read all of these, but I found them instructive for myself and for my interview subjects in part 3.

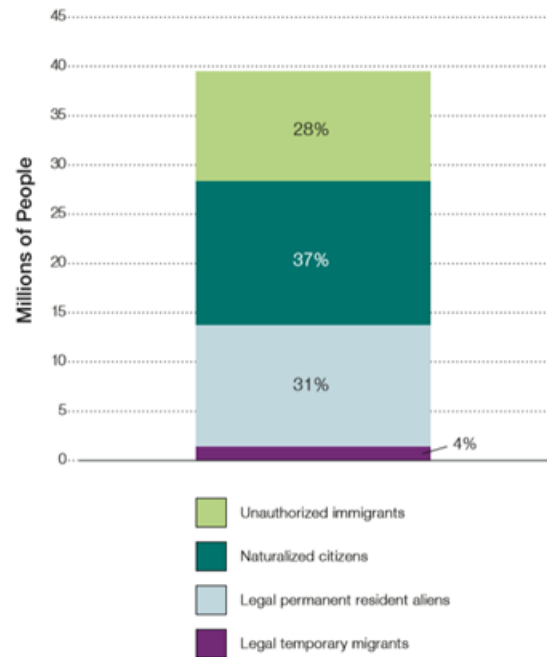
The following graphs are from The Brookings Institution policy memo:¹

FIGURE 1.
U.S. Foreign-Born Population



Source: US Bureau of the Census

FIGURE 2.
Foreign-Born Population by Legal Status



Source: Passel and Cohn Table 3(2010, p. 2). Estimates from Pew Hispanic Center, based on tabulations from the augmented March 2009 Current Population Survey.

¹ Greenstone, Michael, and Adam Looney. "Ten Economic Facts About Immigration." *The Hamilton Project*, The Brookings Institution, 25 Sept. 2010, www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/09_immigration.pdf.

FIGURE 6.
Effect of Immigration on Wages of U.S.-Born Workers

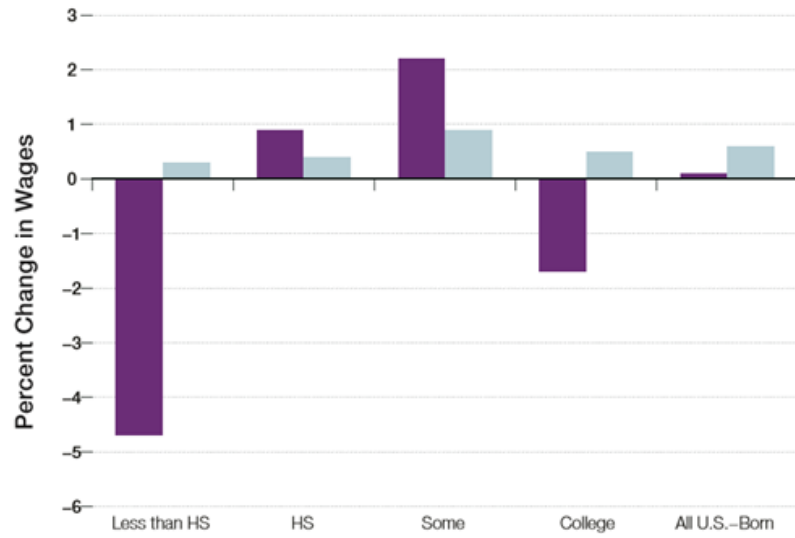
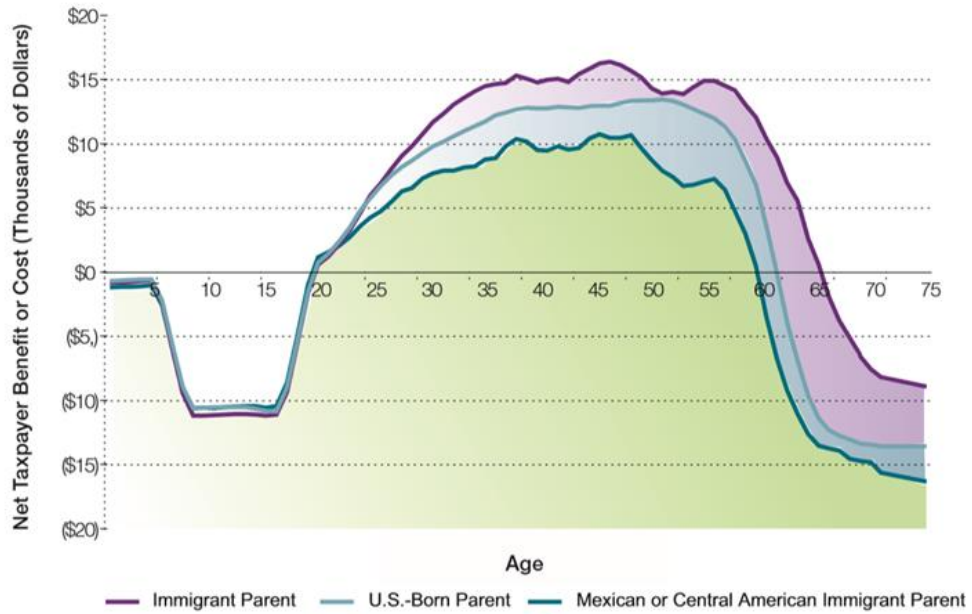
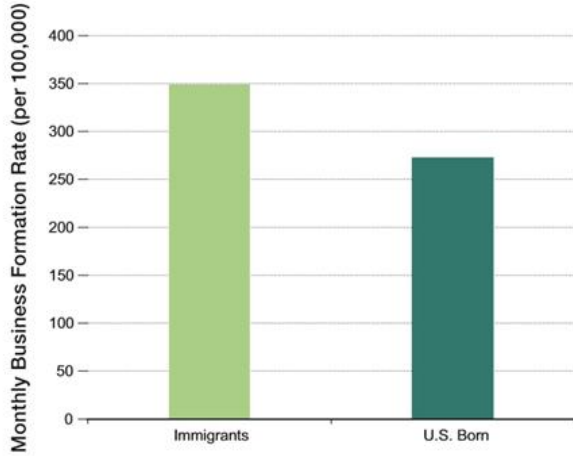


FIGURE 7.
Net Taxpayer Cost or Benefit by Age



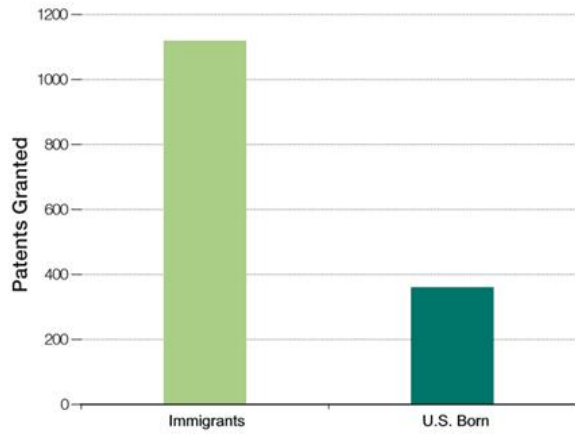
Source: IPUMS-CPS - 2005-2009 March CPS; U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 13.
Monthly Business Formation by
Immigrants and U.S. Born



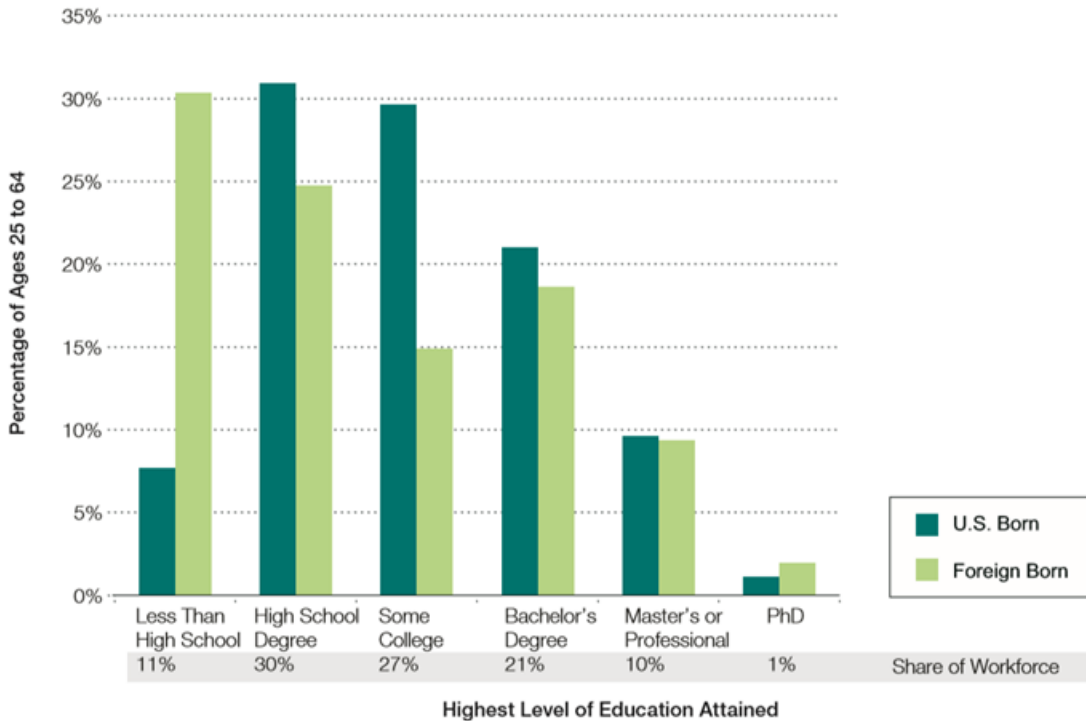
Source: Fairlie, R.W., "Estimating the Contribution of Immigrant Business Owners to the U.S. Economy," Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy (Nov 2008)

FIGURE 14.
Number of Patents Granted per 10,000
Post-College Graduates



Source: Patents granted over the period 1998-2003. Hunt and Gauthier-Loiselle (2003), Table 1

Education of U.S. Born and Foreign Born



Source: IPUMS-CPS - 2008-2009 March CPS. Ages 25 to 64. Foreign Born Arriving After 1980.

The following chart is from the Bipartisan Policy Center:²

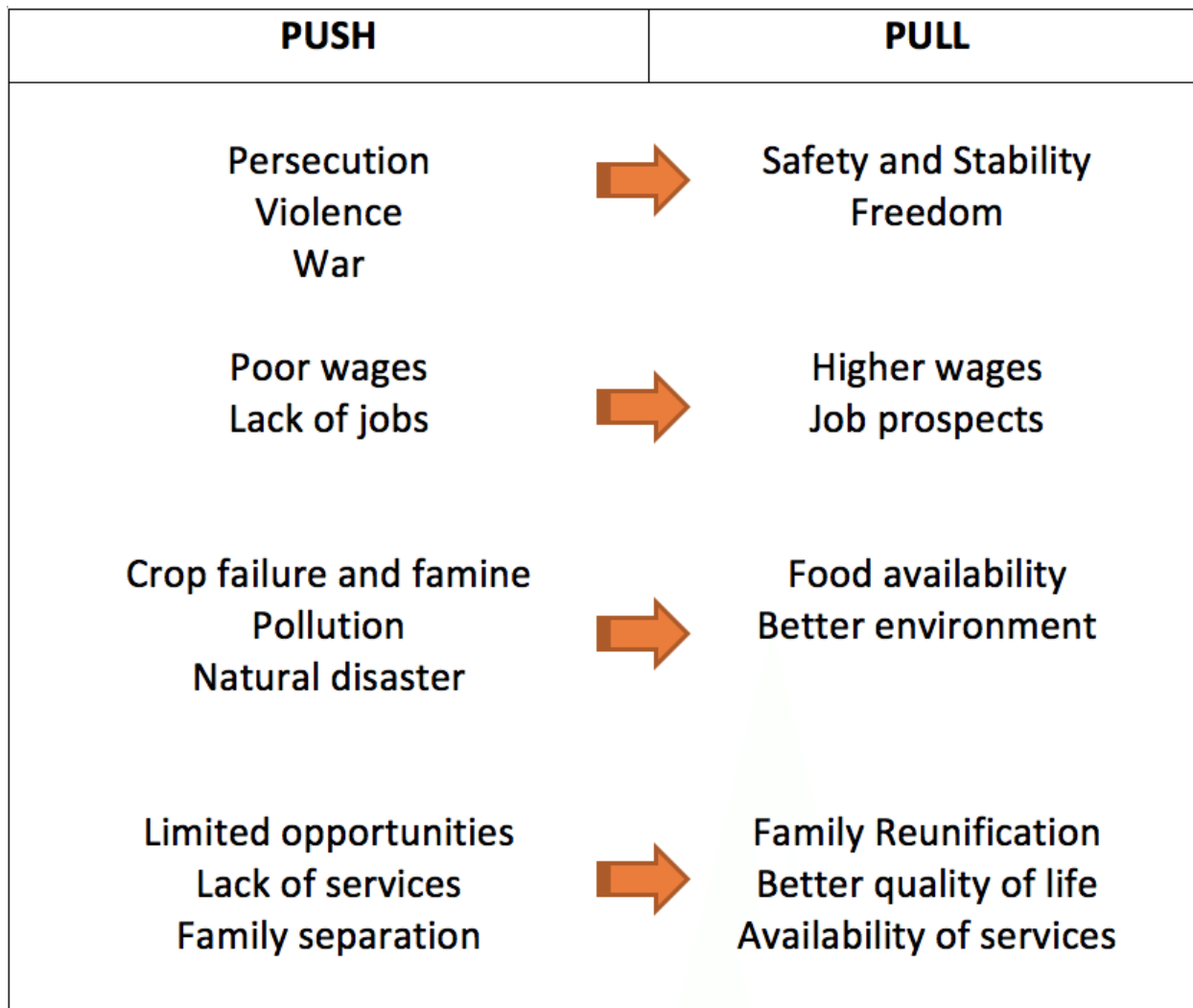
TABLE 1: WHAT FEDERAL BENEFITS ARE UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS ELIGIBLE FOR?

Tax Credits (Refundable)	Ineligible for most tax credits; ITIN holders with U.S. children can receive the Child Tax Credit
Pell Grants & Student Loans	Ineligible
Unemployment Insurance	Ineligible
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	Ineligible
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	Ineligible
Social Security	Ineligible
Medicaid	Emergency service only
Health Care Premium and Cost-Sharing Assistance	Ineligible
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	No federal care; some states cover for labor and delivery, prenatal, and postpartum care

Source: [Congressional Budget Office](#) and [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

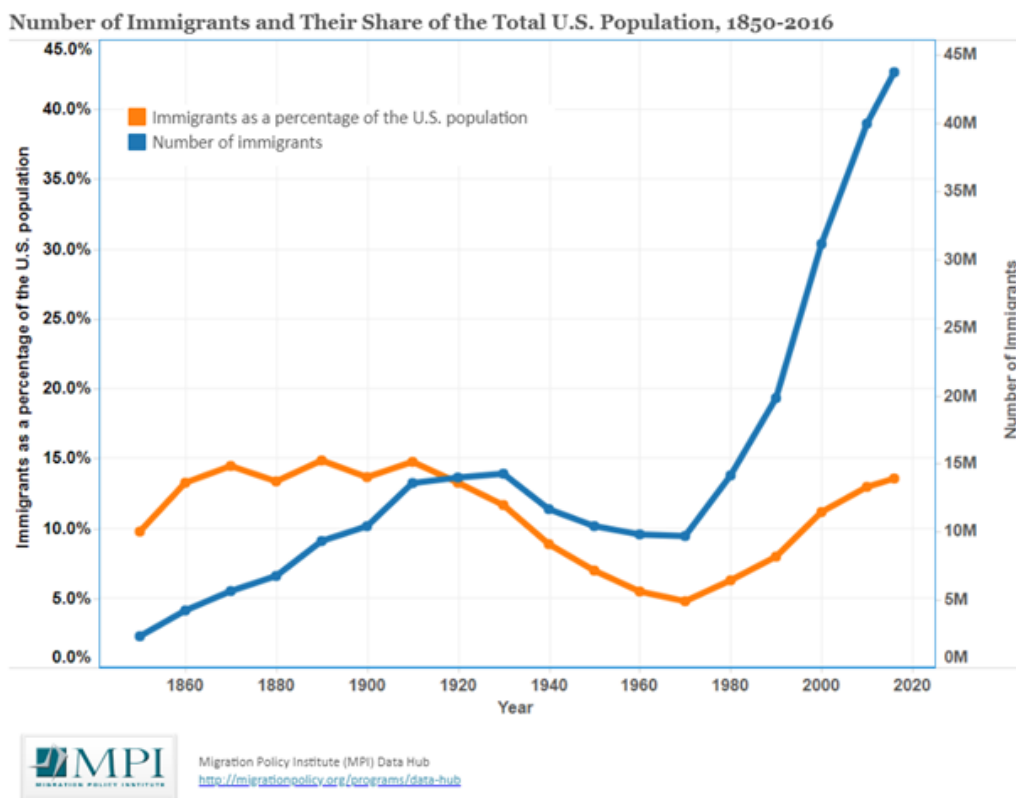
² Hallman, Hunter. "How Do Undocumented Immigrants Pay Federal Taxes? An Explainer." *Bipartisan Policy Center*, 18 Mar. 2018, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/how-do-undocumented-immigrants-pay-federal-taxes-an-explainer/>.

This chart comes from the Justice for Immigrants website:³



³ “Root Causes of Migration.” *Justice for Immigrants*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 14 Feb. 2017, <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigration/root-causes-of-migration/>.

This graph is from the Migration Policy Institute:
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“Notes:

The term "immigrants" (also known as the foreign born) refers to people residing in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), certain legal nonimmigrants (e.g., persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status, and persons illegally residing in the United States.

“Source:

Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2016 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Census. All other data are from Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (Working Paper no. 29., U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999)."⁵

⁴ "U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-Present." *Migration Policy Institute*, MigrationPolicy.org, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true.

⁵ Ibid.

The following charts are from the Migration Policy Institute:⁶

Table 1: Numerical Size and Share of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1970-2014

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 and 2014 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970-2000 decennial Census.

Year	Size of Immigrant Population (Millions)	Immigrant Share of Total U.S. Population (%)
1970	9.6	4.7
1980	14.1	6.2
1990	19.8	7.9
2000	31.1	11.1
2010	40.0	12.9
2014	42.4	13.3

Table 2. Share of Immigrant and U.S.-Born Workers by Select Occupation, 2014

Note: The percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2014 ACS.

Occupation	Share of Foreign-Born Workers in Occupation (%)	Share of Native-Born Workers in Occupation (%)
Management, professional, and related	30.3	38.2
Service	24.6	16.9
Sales and office	17.0	25.1
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	12.9	8.1
Production, transportation, and material-moving	15.2	11.7

⁶ Zong, Jie, and Jeanne Batalova. "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States." *Migration Policy Institute*, MigrationPolicy.org, 14 Apr. 2016, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-5.

Step 3 continued:

Other results of my research include that in 2014, the immigrant population was 13.3% of the total American population, that in 2014 India was actually the country from which the most new immigrants came, followed by China and then Mexico, and that as far back as 1850 -- the first year the census recorded immigration statistics -- immigrants made up almost 10% of the US population⁷. In other words (as is shown in Table 1 above), immigration is not much higher percentage-wise now than it has been in the past (actually it peaked in 1890 at 14.8%)⁸. Furthermore, in 2014, almost half (47%) of immigrants (including undocumented immigrants) were naturalized American citizens⁹. Also, immigrants are almost as likely to have higher education as native-born adults (29% versus 30% of each group, respectably), and if you look at those who immigrated since 2010, the figure rises to 44%¹⁰. However, it is true that native-born Americans are 20% more likely to have a GED or high school diploma¹¹. My research also revealed that over half of Mexican immigrants reside in either California or Texas, and that only 27% of immigrants, as opposed to 34% of native-born Americans, had public health insurance (this aligns with the graph demonstrating that immigrants are not a drain on government benefits)¹². As for refugees and asylum seekers, the US accepted just under a measly 70,000 refugees in 2015, and around 23,500 asylum-seekers, and the most common country of origin for asylum seekers was actually China¹³.

A fall in migration from Central America in the summer of 2014 was partially caused by increased US-Mexico border enforcement efforts and detentions of migrant families, seeming to suggest that increased border control can in fact decrease immigration¹⁴. Also in relation to common misconceptions about immigrants' economic status, I discovered that over half of foreign-born people in America are homeowners, and that immigrants are actually buying homes faster than native-borns¹⁵. Immigrants are more likely to be poor than native-born Americans (a 17.3% poverty rate compared to 14.3%), however in 2015 working-class immigrant households only got 9.3% of their income from public programs like Social Security and food assistance, whereas comparable US-born households got 15% of their income from government programs¹⁶.

⁷ Zong, Jie, and Jeanne Batalova. "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States." *Migration Policy Institute*, MigrationPolicy.org, 14 Apr. 2016, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-5.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Rosenblum, Marc R, and Isabel Ball. "Trends in Unaccompanied Child and Family Migration from Central America." *Migration Policy Institute*, MigrationPolicy.org, Jan. 2016, www.migrationpolicy.org/research/trends-unaccompanied-child-and-family-migration-central-america.

¹⁵ Nicholson, Michael D, and CAP Immigration Team. "The Facts on Immigration Today: 2017 Edition." *Center for American Progress*, Center for American Progress, 20 Apr. 2017, 9:00 am, www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2017/04/20/430736/facts-immigration-today-2017-edition/.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Step 4: Assess initial views

'Inert information' is the internalization or acceptance of information that is merely memorized but not sufficiently understood to be well-applied, while 'activated ignorance' is the (dangerous) application of false information that we believe to be true. 'Activated knowledge,' on the other hand, is retaining, understanding and then using accurate information with the end result of deeper understanding, additional knowledge and/or rational action.

I think that the majority of my initial views on immigration in the US fall under the category of inert information. For example, my thoughts on why people leave their home countries, immigrants' effects on the economy, and where immigrants settle in the US turned out to be generally correct, but I didn't really do anything with this information or apply it to anyone's benefit. One area of my activated ignorance was that I believed increased border patrol funding did little to achieve its aim; this makes sense with my biases, since liberals generally tend to favor more lax borders. My presumption in my introduction that Latin American immigration is on the rise, which I did not even think to list as a preconception because it seemed so obvious and basic to me, turned out to be activated ignorance. I don't really think any of my stated beliefs were activated knowledge, except perhaps my more general conviction/impression that immigrants do not take a toll on the US economy and that they are generally normal, hard-working people. Many of my views were certainly refined by the specific information I learned from the statistics; for example, I could now quote from memory to someone that US immigration peaked in 1890, but is currently only about one percentage point below that high point.

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