

Immigration: New citizens improve Canada and benefit the economy



By [David Kilgour](#) | [David vs. David](#) – Fri, 19 Oct, 2012

During the current election campaigns for the White House, Congress and state governments, it has become clear that many Americans think their immigration system is broken and they are shrieking for major repairs.

The campaign websites of Obama and Romney express sincere support for both immigration and reform of the system, but Romney probably has a point in stressing that the president has done little to tackle problems effectively during almost four years. Obama's defense of his record on the issue rings somewhat hollow.

A majority of Americans across the country now appears to want fewer new immigrants in the present economic climate. As it is, only a small number of states — including Ohio and Florida — will decide who wins in the electoral college, Obama and Romney understandably are both trying not to lose swing state voters on this and other potential vote-changing issues.

A study issued by the Congressional research service early this year agreed with the need for change in America's immigration system, but noted that the two previous Congresses failed to achieve comprehensive reform despite the very high levels of unemployment and spending restrictions adopted by all levels of government.

The number of foreign-born persons living in America — 12.5 % — is the highest since the early part of the twentieth century, says the research service, adding that among the 38 million foreign-born residents about 16 million are citizens and 21 million are not. Homeland Security estimates that as of early 2010 almost 11 million of the non-citizen residents in a total population of about 308 million are unauthorized aliens. This figure is cited by critics as showing the effects of bad legislation, policies and administration.

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Attitudes are quite different in Canada, where we have had one of the highest per capita immigration rates in the world over the past 20 years. During this period, we accepted about 250,000 permanent immigrants each year. By 2031, almost half of our population over the age of 15 is expected to be either foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent. The non-European-origin communities will double and make up the majority of the population in our larger cities, particularly Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

A study by Jeffrey Reitz for the independent Institute for Research on Public Policy last year found that majority support nationally for high levels of immigration is continuing. The view is under-girded by widespread pride in multiculturalism and a conviction that newcomers benefit the economy.

Canada has welcomed immigrants for centuries and continues to do so, unlike the U.S., U.K., Netherlands and France, where population majorities today say they want reductions. One good indication of this phenomenon, says Reitz, is that there is rarely any focus on immigration in Canadian election campaigns and all political parties "espouse pro-immigration policies and the public rarely asks them to defend these policies. The word 'immigration' is seldom, if ever, mentioned in the nationally televised leaders' debates." All parties compete to be perceived as favouring immigration.

Even in provinces where the economies are weaker, immigration is sought as an economic stimulant, although Reitz notes that worsening employment may be threatening the economy-assisting perception. Newcomers pay taxes and offer a broad



Canadians overwhelmingly support high levels of immigration.

range of skills, with about half of them currently bringing bachelor's degrees. A major ongoing controversy is the underuse of immigrant skills, with numerous policies created to address the problem, including fairer assessment of foreign credentials. In 2010, there were 182, 000 temporary foreign workers across the country and serious questions have been raised about their treatment by some sponsors and employers.

Reitz concludes that as of November, 2010 that there was majority support in every major region of Canada for our current high levels of immigration. The support indicated then by an Environics opinion survey was even higher in the Atlantic provinces (62.5%), Quebec (61.8%) and the Prairies (62.8 per cent) than in Ontario (53.5%), Alberta (54.4%) and British Columbia (57.4%). The same survey found that about eight out of ten Canadians agreed that immigrants have a positive impact on the economy and that only 25% thought newcomers "take away jobs".

The survey also indicated that despite support for multiculturalism, as Reitz puts it, "... a large share of Canadians want immigrants to integrate fully into the social mainstream. They are also concerned that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values, and they worry about the implications."

It should also be stressed that there is a strong negative reaction to illegal immigrants among Canadians. Our own immigration system has myriad problems, causing the current Minister of Immigration to begin initiatives to eject both illegals and those who obtained citizenship fraudulently. The list of immigrant applicants had become so long that it was abandoned, with would-be immigrants told to re-apply, based primarily on work skills.

Overall, the differences between our two countries over immigration remain substantial.

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