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A majority of Americans say

immigrants mostly fill jobs U.S.

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Note: For the most recent data on this topic, read our <u>October 2024 post</u>.

Work where you shop

Americans generally agree that immigrants – whether undocumented or living legally in the country – mostly do not work in jobs that U.S. citizens want, with a majority saying so across racial and ethnic groups and among both political parties. This is particularly true when it comes to undocumented immigrants. About three-quarters of adults (77%) say undocumented immigrants mostly fill jobs U.S. citizens *do not* want, while 21% say undocumented immigrants fill jobs U.S. citizens would like to have, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted April 29 to May 5.

Most Americans say immigrants mainly fill jobs US citizens don't want | Pew Research Center

About three-quarters of Americans say undocumented immigrants mostly fill jot. U.S. citizens do not want; a lower share say the same about legal immigrants



Note: White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 29 to May 5, 2020. PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Hispanics (88%) are most likely to say undocumented immigrants mostly fill jobs U.S. citizens do not want, with more Hispanic immigrants than U.S.-born Hispanics saying so (94% vs. 82%). By comparison, similar shares of white (75%) and black (71%) adults say the same.

The findings are little changed from August 2019, when <u>77% of U.S. adults</u> said undocumented immigrants fill jobs U.S. citizens do not want. They come amid <u>mounting</u> job losses across the nation <u>during the COVID-19 outbreak</u>. The U.S. unemployment rate soared to 14.7% in April, up from 4.4% in March, the <u>highest monthly rate</u> since 1948. In May, it <u>was 13.3%</u>. The Center's <u>April-May survey found</u> most Americans say the federal government does not have a responsibility to provide economic help to undocumented immigrants who have lost their job due to the outbreak.

How we did this \oplus

Some of the biggest differences in views of whether undocumented immigrants mostly fill jobs U.S. citizens do not want are along party lines. The vast majority of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (87%) say this, compared with 66% of Republicans and Republican leaners. However, <u>partisan differences are significantly wider</u> on other issues related to undocumented immigrants.

Differences also exist by educational attainment. Large shares of U.S. adults with a postgraduate degree (88%) and those with a bachelor's degree (84%) say undocumented immigrants mostly fill jobs U.S. citizens do not want, compared with 78% of those with some college experience and 69% of those with a high school diploma or less.

A majority of Americans across various groups also say *legal* immigrants currently in the country mostly fill jobs U.S. citizens do not want. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans say this, including similar shares of white and black adults (62% each). About three-quarters of Hispanics (74%) say the same, with a higher share of Hispanic immigrants (81%) than U.S.-born Hispanics (68%) saying so. About 70% of the nation's 42 million Hispanic adults have close immigrant connections – roughly 19 million are immigrants themselves, and almost 10 million born in the United States have at least one parent who is an immigrant, according to estimates from 2019 and 2020 <u>Current Population Survey data</u>.

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Many immigrants living legally in the U.S. hold jobs <u>deemed essential</u> by the federal government, including an estimated 2.7 million who worked in the health care sector, or nearly 15% of all health care workers as of 2017, the most recent year for which Center estimates on both legal and unauthorized immigrant populations are available.

Unauthorized immigrant workers in the U.S.

An estimated 7.6 million undocumented (or unauthorized) immigrants worked in the U.S. as of 2017 – down from a peak of 8.3 million in 2008 – accounting for nearly 5% of all U.S. workers.

About 750,000 unauthorized immigrants held jobs in industries that produce and distribute food – food production (290,000), food processing (210,000), food retail (170,000) and food



distribution (70,000). During the COVID-19 outbreak, these industries, considered part of the nation's food supply chain, are considered <u>essential jobs</u>. Unauthorized immigrants in these four industry groups accounted for more than 9% of workers in these food sectors in 2017, nearly double their share among all U.S. workers. Together, legal and unauthorized immigrants made up nearly a quarter (23%) of the nation's nearly 8.2 million workers in food industries.

Many undocumented immigrants work in industries that are at risk for job loss during the current coronavirus outbreak because they hold positions that are <u>difficult to perform</u> remotely. In all, 84% of undocumented immigrant workers held such jobs in 2017, including those in the service sector (2.3 million workers) and construction sector (1.3 million workers). By comparison, 62% of U.S. workers held these types of jobs. Much of the difference between these groups is due to undocumented immigrants' jobs being more difficult to telework, even if the job is in an industry, like education and health, where large shares can work remotely.

The Trump administration has largely <u>halted legal immigration</u> to the U.S. in recent months, though it has temporarily changed <u>visa rules for foreign guest workers</u> to make it easier for them to remain employed at meat processing plants and other food and agriculture jobs. Although unauthorized immigration has slowed in recent years, this spring's <u>steep drop</u> in apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border could be a sign that unauthorized immigration into the U.S. has slowed further during the outbreak.

Detailed tables: Legal and unauthorized immigrant workers by state \oplus

California had about 6.7 million immigrant workers as of 2017, the most in the nation, which account for nearly a quarter of all U.S. immigrant workers. The state had 5.2 million legal immigrant workers (24% of all U.S. legal immigrant workers) and 1.5 million unauthorized immigrant workers (20% of all U.S. unauthorized immigrant workers). Texas had the next largest immigrant workforce, with 2.1 million legal immigrant workers and 1.1 million unauthorized immigrant workers.



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In California, about 570,000 immigrants held jobs in food production and distribution industries that make up the nation's food chain, the most in the nation as of 2017. They account for about half of the state's workers in these industries – 33% are legal immigrants and 17% are unauthorized immigrants. In Texas, 170,000 immigrants work in food industries, the next highest total. They are 28% of the state's food workers – 17% are legal immigrants and 11% are unauthorized immigrants.

Industries and occupations of U.S. legal and unauthorized immigrants

Unauthorized immigrants accounted for nearly 5% of the U.S. workforce in 2017, while legal immigrants accounted for nearly 13% of workers.

Among industries, which refer to the kind of business conducted by an employer, immigrants accounted for more than a quarter of workers in the agriculture sector, the highest of any industry. Unauthorized immigrants (14%) and legal immigrants (15%)



% of workers in industries who are immigrants, 2017



Note: Percentages calculated from unrounded numbers. Rankings based on unrounded percentages. "Personal/other services" refers to the Census Bureau's "Other services" group and includes those who work in private households. Other industry group names correspond to Census Bureau classifications for major industry groups. See "How we did this" for more. Source: Pew Research Center estimates from augmented 2017 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

accounted for similar shares of agriculture workers.

Compared with their share of the U.S. workforce, a relatively high share of unauthorized immigrants also worked in industries such as construction (12%), leisure and hospitality (8%), personal and other services (7%) and manufacturing (6%). While the share of U.S. legal immigrants in construction (13%) was similar to the unauthorized share, legal immigrants made up a higher share of workers in personal and other services (15%), manufacturing (14%) and leisure and hospitality (12%).

Detailed tables: Industry and occupation groups \oplus

Among occupations, which refer to the kind of work people do on the job, immigrants have the largest presence in farming, where unauthorized (22%) and legal immigrants (21%) accounted for more than four-in-ten workers as of 2017. In construction jobs, unauthorized immigrants were 15% of all workers, more than three times their share among all U.S. workers. By contrast, legal immigrants accounted for

Legal and unauthorized immigrants make up a significant share of workers in some occupations

% of workers in occupations who are immigrants, 2017



Note: Percentages calculated from unrounded numbers. Rankings based on unrounded percentages. Occupation groups correspond to Census Bureau classifications for major occupation groups. See methodology for full Census Bureau classifications. See "How we did this" for more.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates from augmented 2017 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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13% of workers in construction, similar to their share among workers overall.



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Compared with their share of the overall U.S. workforce, unauthorized immigrants had a larger presence in production (8%), service (8%) and transportation and material moving (6%). Meanwhile, the share of legal immigrants in these occupations was similar to their share among the U.S. workforce overall.				
Note: Here are <u>the questions used</u> for this report, along with responses, and <u>its</u> <u>methodology</u> .				
Topics Economy & Work, Immigration & Economy, Unauthorized Immigration, Unemployment, Unemployment				
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