

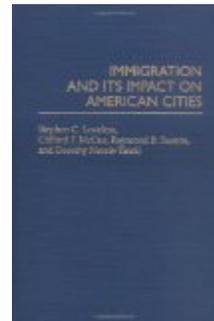
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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Stephen C. Loveless, Clifford P. McCue, Raymond B. Surette, Dorothy Norris-Tirrell. *Immigration and Its Impact on American Cities*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996. xvi + 179 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-94500-8.

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Published on H-Urban (February, 1997)



Assessing and Predicting the Impact of Immigration on Communities

The debate over the costs and benefits of immigration to government revenues continues nationally. Governor Pete Wilson criticizes the federal government claiming that the futility of the INS in stopping illegal immigration has cost California millions. The question of whether immigrants contribute more revenues than they utilize in services is a central issue in this book. However, the authors go beyond the vitriolic debate by assessing the impacts in an even-handed manner and suggesting ways local officials can manage future immigration. Thus, the authors hope to “bridge the gap between research findings and techniques” to help local government managers cope with immigration.

Although numerous studies assess federal and state impacts of immigration, few focus on the local level where the impact, the authors argue, is most strongly felt. The great diversity of recent immigrants burdens local administrators, who must provide language training and other services. The potential decline in federal and state resources increases the need for local officials to assess current and future immigrant needs. The book offers local administrators a model to help manage the financial impact of immigration on their communities. The book details ways administrators can assess the causes and rate of past immigration, survey the motivations, information and skill levels of current immigrants; and use experts and statistical models to project future immigration. The study then assesses all the data to predict future immigration effects on local revenues and expenditures. The authors use Miami as a case study to assess the pol-

icy implications for “planning, managing, and to some degree controlling immigration in a given jurisdiction.” Admittedly this is a tall order, given the volatility of immigration trends.

Chapter 1 is a historical overview of immigration trends in the United States since the 1700s and of the fiscal impact on cities of national immigration policies. Chapter 2 discusses various ways to estimate the number of documented and undocumented immigrants in a local area. Chapter 3 describes a field survey that provides information about why current immigrants settled where they did, what information sources they used, and which local services they were most likely to use in the future. Chapter 4 demonstrates a survey of expert opinions about the current and future rate and type of immigration and the possible affects of immigration on local areas. Chapter 5 tries to assess the impact of immigrants, using the Mariel boatlift to Miami. Chapter 6 applies this information to predict future immigration rates, characteristics, and rates of demand for local services. Chapter 7 combines the data to assess the impact of immigration on local revenues and expenditures. The appendixes are copies of survey instruments.

Though the book is primarily designed for public administrators, it contributes to the debate on the impact of immigration. The authors note that this impact is determined not just by the newcomers’ work skills, language ability, or socioeconomic status, but also by the community’s attitude toward immigrants, the willingness to hire

and provide support through ethnic enclaves, or access to government services and alternative support.

Studies of the fiscal benefits and burdens of immigration reach conflicting conclusions. The authors assert that immigration burdens local governments more than federal or state governments. Municipalities must provide most of the services immigrants utilize. State and federal governments are less burdened by immigration since they provide services like defense, environmental protection, and international commerce, which are less affected by immigration (p. 13).

Chapter 1 presents an overview of American immigration history and federal policy. The authors conclude that many policies reflected a desire to “stave the flow of immigration” such as the immigration acts of 1921 and 1924. These policies reflected the assumption that immigrants had a negative impact on society. Most significantly, although immigration greatly affected specific cities, the federal government set immigration policy with little knowledge of the impact of immigration on local areas.

Chapter 2 describes the difficulties of using official immigrant data available in the census and from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Accurate counts are difficult for a number of reasons. Most importantly, illegal immigration is not included in official statistics. The authors propose a model for combining official data with school enrollment figures, asylum requests, and rate of births by foreign nationals. The authors note the importance of the 1965 Immigration Act’s preferences for family reunification. Future immigration will likely concentrate in those areas most affected by the post-1965 immigrants. Those immigrants will bring their families in the future. The 1990 act reaffirmed first-preference status from occupation to family reunification. Thus as those immigrants become eligible to bring in family members, they reinforce pre-existing nationality patterns of settlement.

This trend toward family reunification also has implications for the services the future immigrants will require. Because of enclaving they may have support services in place and therefore will be less dependent on local services. Or they will have more information from relatives about available services. Since many will be children joining older relatives, few will be employed and they will place a high demand on educational services (p. 40).

The major problem with official data is that they as-

sess past trends, not current realities. The authors try to compensate for those limitations with a field survey described in chapter 3. The survey is a relatively inexpensive tool for determining causes of immigration and needs of the immigrants, past, present, and in the future. In their Miami case study, Nicaraguans and Haitians made up 81 percent of respondents, reflecting the authors’ concern with large illegal populations about which less is known.

The survey asks immigrants why they immigrated and settled in a particular location. The authors especially desire information about preparations the immigrants undertook, if any, prior to immigrating. Immigrants with some English ability, savings, and knowledge of the local area will have a different impact on local governments. Better prepared immigrants might have a lower initial burden but will more quickly use such services as education, parks, and health care and so will have a higher impact over time than less well prepared immigrants. The latter will have a higher immediate demand but will be slower to use long-term services than better prepared arrivals.

The immigrants answered that they received most of their information about the United States from family members living in their home country. Few prior to arrival accessed information from family or friends already living in the United States. In the case of housing, immigrants learned of opportunities from family and friends in their home countries, or drifted into immigrant communities without prior planning, augmenting pre-existing immigrant enclaves. The authors conclude that since few immigrants consulted sources of information from the United States, local U.S. administrators can have little influence over immigrant settlement decisions (p. 64).

The survey asked the immigrants for future plans. Many wanted to improve job skills, further their education, learn English, and become citizens. Thus they were permanent residents not sojourners. In the long term, however, many of these goals are not realized, so local governments need long-term plans and policies for those who continue to need services. The survey revealed an important contradiction. Preparedness varies by nationality. Those least prepared are most likely to require government services. Yet they are the least likely to use them out of fear or lack of knowledge. However, the presence of poorly prepared immigrants “will be felt indirectly through medical care, schools, and housing, and eventually upon municipal revenues and expenditures”

(p. 65).

In chapter 4, the authors use a modified snow-ball sampling procedure to ask local and national immigration experts about future projections. The survey asked immigration experts to predict which groups would come, why they would come, where they would settle, and their probable use of services. The experts predicted that immigrants would not unduly burden local police services, but would increase demands for emergency medical services.

In chapter 5, the authors create hypothetical outcomes regarding revenues and expenditures using data from Miami following the Mariel boatlift in the period 1979-1989. They conclude that the immigrants were a small burden, only \$25 per person per year. This estimate suggests that immigrants have been scapegoated for revenue decline in the local areas (p. 118).

In chapter 6 the authors compare various quantitative methods for estimating future immigration. They use figures from 1989 and compare which models most accurately predicted the number of actual immigrants. All of the methods undercounted, and produced such wide ranges of possible outcomes as to be of little use. Predictions are difficult as a result of political uncertainty both in the United States and abroad. No one has studied how the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act which added employer sanctions will affect future immigration. Nor is the future impact of the North America Free Trade Agreement known. Thus quantitative data alone, the authors argue, cannot give an accurate projection.

In chapter 7 the authors attempt to apply predications of future immigration to the impact on local revenues and

expenditures. The authors conclude that the impact of immigrants on revenues greatly depends on the level of continued intergovernmental revenue. If the federal and state authorities cut back on contributions to local revenues, the immigrant impact is severe. But if current or past levels of intergovernmental funding remain stable or increase the local burden is lighter (p. 137).

This study is very thorough and offers many suggestions for local administrators anticipating the impact on revenues of current and future immigrants. One missing piece is the pull factor. While it is true that family reunification and chain migration bring immigrants to specific areas, jobs do also. Studying the immigrants might not be enough. The plans of employers must also be assessed. When a new factory moves into town, the word spreads and the immigrants will arrive.

The authors' conclusion that immigrants benefit state and federal governments yet burden local governments directly challenges state governors, such as Pete Wilson's demand for more federal support for California's state expenditures on immigrants. The study moves beyond the debate by focusing on what localities can do to lessen the jarring impact of immigration on local services, and thus one can hope it will contribute to a reduction in anti-immigrant hostility. Ultimately, however, the study leads to the conclusion that the level of anti-immigrant hostility in any local area will depend a lot on whether federal and state revenues continue at current levels, are increased, or decrease.

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Citation: Joseph A. Rodriguez. Review of Loveless, Stephen C.; McCue, Clifford P.; Surette, Raymond B.; Norris-Tirrell, Dorothy, *Immigration and Its Impact on American Cities*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. February, 1997.

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