

Misperceptions about immigration make reform harder

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) – As Congress continues to debate immigration reform, many groups and politicians have expressed concerns that public misperceptions surrounding the issue may limit any real change to immigration policy. Recently, journalists, news outlets, and non-partisan fact-checking organizations have criticized Republican members of Congress for misrepresenting the facts about immigration reform. Here are four claims about immigration that some Republican members of Congress have been circulating.

Claim #1: Illegal immigrants benefit from U.S. public welfare programs.

Congressional Republicans say that illegal immigrants cost American taxpayers \$113 billion per year. The majority of the costs stem from welfare benefits such as food stamps and public housing assistance.

Claim #2: Immigrants today are not integrating into American life like past waves did.

Republicans note that most new immigrants resist learning English and fully integrate into American culture. This limits immigrants' ability to understand political information, serve on juries, participate in judicial proceedings, and serve in the armed forces.

Claim #3: Immigrants are more likely to become criminals than are native-born U.S. citizens.

Republicans say that illegal immigrants are five times more likely to commit a felony than are U.S. citizens. Republicans claim that illegal immigrants have a higher probability to be involved in serious crimes such as murder, assault, kidnapping, and prostitution.

Claim #4: The current proposed legislation allows any person living in the U.S. illegally to become a citizen.

Republicans claim that over 10 million current illegal immigrants would quickly become U.S. citizens were a new immigration reform law to pass, which would make them immediately eligible for government benefits.

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Claim #1: Illegal immigrants benefit from U.S. public welfare programs.

Congressional Republicans say that illegal immigrants cost American taxpayers \$113 billion per year. The majority of the costs stem from welfare benefits such as food stamps and public housing assistance.

FACTS: U.S. law strictly prohibits undocumented immigrants from receiving the following benefits: welfare, non-emergency health coverage, disability coverage, public or assisted housing, food assistance, or unemployment compensation.

Claim #2: Immigrants today are not integrating into American life like past waves did.

Republicans note that most new immigrants resist learning English and fully integrate into American culture. This limits immigrants' ability to understand political information, serve on juries, participate in judicial proceedings, and serve in the armed forces.

FACTS: An overwhelming majority of today's immigrants seek English instruction such that adult-education programs cannot meet demand. Only 7% of second generation Latinos use Spanish as their main language. More than 68,000 foreign-born individuals are currently serving in the U.S. military and more than half of them are not yet citizens.

Claim #3: Immigrants are more likely to become criminals than are native-born U.S. citizens.

Republicans say that illegal immigrants are five times more likely to commit a felony than are U.S. citizens. Republicans claim that illegal immigrants have a higher probability to be involved in serious crimes such as murder, assault, kidnapping, and prostitution.

FACTS: Evidence from the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Justice indicates that the statistics provided by Republicans are inaccurate. Foreign-born individuals ages 18-39 are five times less likely to be incarcerated than are the native-born. Violent crime rates, including those of noncitizens, have dropped dramatically since 2005. Murders, rape, robbery, and assault have seen a 22.6% decrease in the past eight years.

Claim #4: The current proposed legislation allows any person living in the U.S. illegally to become a citizen.

Republicans claim that over 10 million current illegal immigrants would quickly become U.S. citizens were a new immigration reform law to pass, which would make them immediately eligible for government benefits.

FACTS: The current proposed legislation would allow undocumented workers to apply for lawful permanent residency (a "green card"). Those applying for green cards would have to pay taxes, pass additional criminal background and national security checks, register for Selective Service, pay additional fees and penalties, and learn English and U.S. civics. As under current law, five years after receiving a green card, individuals would be eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship like every other legal permanent resident. Legal permanent residents would not be eligible for welfare and other federal benefits.

Conclusion:

Fact-checking efforts by the independent fact-checking organization, Political Facts, as well as by the AP, indicate that each of these four claims made by Republicans about immigration is false. The claims are based on inaccurate and misleading information and statistics.

Misperceptions about the death penalty cloud debate

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) – As states across the country continue to evaluate their stance on the death penalty, many groups and politicians have expressed concerns that public misperceptions surrounding the issue may limit any real change to death penalty policy. Recently, journalists, news outlets, and non-partisan fact-checking organizations have criticized Democratic members of Congress for misrepresenting the facts about the death penalty. Here are four claims about the death penalty that some Democratic members of Congress have been circulating.

Claim #1: The number of inmates executed is growing.

Democrats cite a recent report stating that the number of American prisoners put to death has increased each year since 2000. The report states that executions in 2012 and 2013 were at their highest level in 20 years.

Claim #2: Minorities are more likely to be executed than whites.

Congressional Democrats also claim that since 1976 more Black and Hispanic inmates have been executed than have White inmates.

Claim #3: It is legal to execute juveniles.

Congressional Democrats have noted that most states with the death penalty allow criminals who are under 18 years of age to be put to death when convicted of murder.

Claim #4: The American public is more supportive of the death penalty than ever before.

Democrats claim that public support for the death penalty is at an all-time high. According to their internal poll, 72 percent of Americans support capital punishment for violent crimes, which is 10 percentage points higher than it was in 2000.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) – As states across the country continue to evaluate their stance on the death penalty, many groups and politicians have expressed concerns that public misperceptions surrounding the issue may limit any real change to death penalty policy. Recently, journalists, news outlets, and non-partisan fact-checking organizations have criticized Democratic members of Congress for misrepresenting the facts about the death penalty. According to Political Facts, an independent fact-checking organization, here are the facts about four claims about the death penalty that some Democratic members of Congress have been circulating.

Claim #1: The number of inmates executed is growing.

Democrats cite a recent report stating that the number of American prisoners put to death has increased each year since 2000. The report states that executions in 2012 and 2013 were at their highest level in 20 years.

FACTS: Political Facts has determined that much of the report cited by Democrats was based on flawed data. The number of inmates executed since 2000 has steadily decreased, not increased. 43 inmates were executed in 2012 and 39 in 2013, which is significantly less than the number in 2000, when 85 people were put to death.

Claim #2: Minorities are more likely to be executed than whites.

Congressional Democrats also claim that since 1976 more Black and Hispanic inmates have been executed than have White inmates.

FACTS: Reviewing the data, Political Facts found that this claim is inaccurate. Since 1976, 56 percent of defendants executed were White, 34 percent were Black, and 8 percent were Hispanic.

Claim #3: It is legal to execute juveniles.

Congressional Democrats have noted that most states with the death penalty allow criminals who are under 18 years of age to be put to death when convicted of murder.

FACTS: Political Facts notes that juveniles cannot be put to death. An investigation showed that the 2005 U.S. Supreme Court case *Roper v. Simmons* struck down the death penalty for juveniles.

Claim #4: The American public is more supportive of the death penalty than ever before.

Democrats claim that public support for the death penalty is at an all-time high. According to their internal poll, 72 percent of Americans support capital punishment for violent crimes, which is 10 percentage points higher than it was in 2000.

FACTS: Political Facts highlights many flaws in the Democrats' poll. Political Facts points to the numbers from several reputable polling firms, which suggests that about 60 percent of Americans are in favor of the death penalty. In fact, public support for the death penalty is the lowest it has been since the early 1990s.

Conclusion:

Fact-checking efforts by the independent fact-checking organization, Political Facts, as well as by the AP, indicate that each of these four claims about the death penalty made by Congressional Democrats is false. The claims are based on inaccurate and misleading information and statistics.