

# Using ProCon.org for Critical Thinking about Illegal Immigration

## I. THE ARGUMENTS - Read the four arguments below in numerical order (1,2,3,4).

### Is illegal immigration an economic burden to America?

PRO (yes)	CON (no)
<p><b>1. The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR)</b>, in its Immigration Issue website section entitled "The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United States Taxpayers," last revised in Feb. 2011, stated:</p> <p>"Illegal immigration costs U.S. taxpayers about \$113 billion a year at the federal, state and local level... The annual outlay that illegal aliens cost U.S. taxpayers is an average amount per native-headed household of \$1,117... Education for the children of illegal aliens constitutes the single largest cost to taxpayers, at an annual price tag of nearly \$52 billion...</p> <p>At the federal level, about one-third of outlays are matched by tax collections from illegal aliens. At the state and local level, an average of less than 5 percent of the public costs associated with illegal immigration is recouped through taxes collected from illegal aliens. Most illegal aliens do not pay income taxes. Among those who do, much of the revenues collected are refunded to the illegal aliens when they file tax returns...</p> <p>With many state budgets in deficit, policymakers have an obligation to look for ways to reduce the fiscal burden of illegal migration. California, facing a budget deficit of \$14.4 billion in 2010-2011, is hit with an estimated \$21.8 billion in annual expenditures on illegal aliens. New York's \$6.8 billion deficit is smaller than its \$9.5 billion in yearly illegal alien costs."</p>	<p><b>2. Alan Greenspan, PhD</b>, former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, stated while testifying before the US Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and Border Security on Apr. 30, 2009:</p> <p>"...[T]here is little doubt that unauthorized, that is, illegal, immigration has made a significant contribution to the growth of our economy. Between 2000 and 2007, for example, it accounted for more than a sixth of the increase in our total civilian labor force. The illegal part of the civilian labor force diminished last year as the economy slowed, though illegals still comprised an estimated 5% of our total civilian labor force. Unauthorized immigrants serve as a flexible component of our workforce, often a safety valve when demand is pressing and among the first to be discharged when the economy falters.</p> <p>Some evidence suggests that unskilled illegal immigrants (almost all from Latin America) marginally suppress wage levels of native-born Americans without a high school diploma, and impose significant costs on some state and local governments.</p> <p>However the estimated wage suppression and fiscal costs are relatively small, and economists generally view the overall economic benefits of this workforce as significantly outweighing the costs."</p>
<p><b>3. Jim Gilchrist, MBA, CPA</b>, Founder and President of The Minuteman Project, in an Aug. 26, 2005 speech titled "The Crushing Economic Burden of Illegal Immigration" and delivered at an immigration conference in Beverly Hills, CA, said:</p> <p>"I've tried to figure out the costs since I have this tax background. What is the cost to each of us as taxpayers to support 30 million illegal aliens, many of whom are working in the underground economy and not contributing to the tax system? And yet they're using the system that bona fide taxpayers provide and pay for... I had to make my own estimate, since the government will not give me these numbers, nor does it care to calculate them... I've come up with my own numbers. And I will stand by these numbers.</p> <p>The annual gross cost to U.S. taxpayers to provide schooling, hospitalization, and whatever plethoric benefits are out there for the 30 million illegal aliens is approximately \$400 billion per year funded by bona fide U.S. taxpayers. That's \$400 billion per year and going up."</p>	<p><b>4. Raul Hinojosa, PhD</b>, Associate Professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, in a July 18, 2005 <i>BusinessWeek</i> interview titled "A Massive Economic Development Boom," said:</p> <p>"First and foremost, [illegal immigration is] a source of value added. The total goods and services that they consume through their paycheck, plus all that they produce for their employers, is close to about \$800 billion. They're also producing at relatively lower costs because the undocumented population typically gets about 20% less in wages than if they were legalized. That leads to lower prices for us and higher profits to employers. In addition, they're obviously a huge consumer base.</p> <p>We've seen that 90% of the wages that the undocumented population gets are spent inside the U.S... [T]otal consumptive capacity remaining in the U.S. is \$400 billion to \$450 billion. If you took away the undocumented population, it would be the worst economic disaster in the history of the U.S."</p>

Question and responses from ProCon.org: <http://immigration.procon.org/viewanswers.asp?questionID=000788>

**II. 20 MINUTE STUDENT GROUP DISCUSSION** – Break yourselves up into small groups and discuss:

- In general, what do you think of each argument made?
- What do you think of the arguments made considering evaluation criteria (A – E) in Section IV below?
  - o Were the statements clear? Current? Strong and convincing? Scientific or emotional? How much do those things matter?
  - o Were the sources good quality? relevant to the subject? Diverse enough to reflect range of opinions?
  - o Was the presentation of information biased? Did the editing, relative length, relative strength of the sources, dates of the statements, or anything else suggest the presentation was not completely neutral?
- Which side do you think won and why?
- What questions (if any) you still have about this issue?

**III. ENTIRE GROUP DISCUSSION** – Back to normal seating. Small group work is over. Now, as one entire group, let's talk about arguments 1 - 4 using evaluation criteria A – E below.

**IV. SOLO SCORING SESSION** – You've read the arguments, discussed them in small groups, and heard views from your peers. Now take five minutes to reflect quietly on everything you've considered and give each argument a score of 1-5 using the criteria listed below. A score of 5 means outstanding, and 1 means terrible. Add up your scores as indicated.

	Argument 1 (pro)	Argument 2 (con)	Argument 3 (pro)	Argument 4 (con)
<b>A Clarity of Statement</b>				
Hard to follow? Well communicated? Clear as can be?				
<b>B Quality of Source</b>				
Poor source? Fairly qualified? Top expert?				
<b>C Age of Statement</b>				
Old news? Somewhat timely? Very recent?				
<b>D Editing of Statement</b>				
Statement too long? Too short? Was use of ... concerning?				
Did statements appear out of context?				
<b>E Strength of Argument</b>				
Weak? Sloppy? Moving? Convincing?				

**TOTALS (25 is the max):** \_\_\_\_\_

*TOTAL PRO (1+3):* \_\_\_\_\_ *TOTAL CON (2+4):* \_\_\_\_\_

Now let's vote again to see how many people are pro, con, or not clearly pro or con on the question: Is illegal immigration an economic burden to America? Which side won? Which side had the biggest increase in supporters?

**VI. WRAP UP – Time, Money, and Bias in Media Production: Why Critical Thinking Is Important**

1. **Time** constraints (deadlines, windows of opportunity, lack of time to reach sources or provide context, reporters juggling too many projects, etc.),
2. **Money** constraints (lack of access to content, video footage, sources that require payment, funds to defend against lawsuits, not enough staff to handle volume of work, etc.), and
3. **Bias** (*corporate* bias = don't anger the sponsors, avoid certain stories, spin towards something favorable to the business, subtly or openly criticize competitors, etc.; *personal* bias = play it safe and keep my job, cover easier topics and fewer time-consuming ones in order to increase output, stay away from anything that may get the company in trouble, etc., cover issues that personally interest me vs. appeal to our paying readers).

Do we lose our ability to think critically given the constraints in traditional media production?

No. Critical thinking in this environment is certainly more difficult, however, having a questioning attitude and possessing the skills to know which questions to ask (and using ProCon.org) will make up for many of the shortcomings in media production and allow for critical thinking on important issues that affect us all.