

Parallel Session 8B: Immigration and Well-Being

Immigration and Economic Well-Being in the United States, 1982-2007

Corresponding Author:

Thomas Masterson
masterso@levy.org
Levy Economics Institute of Bard College

Co-author:

Selcuk Eren
Levy Economics Institute of Bard College

Abstract

The level of inequality has grown rapidly since the early 1980s in the United States (Zacharias, Wolff, and Masterson 2009). This coincides with increased immigration into the US (Yearbook of Immigration Statistics in the United States, 2008). Changes in the immigration rate and the age, education, and skills mix of immigrants may all have contributed to the increase in inequality (Card 2009). This paper aims to answer the question: how has the increase in immigration (especially of undocumented immigrants) since the early 80s affected the distribution of economic well-being among the immigrant population in the United States?

We use information from Annual Demographic Supplement (ADS) in 1982, 1992, and 2000 and the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) in 2007 to identify immigrant households (including undocumented immigrants, following the method in Passell, 2006) to estimate their contribution to inequality in the United States. First, we compare estimates of inequality among immigrants vs. the overall population to have some basic idea of contribution of immigrants to the observed increase in inequality. While this gives us some idea of the potential effects, it does not tell the whole story. We, then, estimate the LIMEW (Levy Institute Measure of Economic Well-being) for undocumented immigrant households and compare the results with the overall LIMEW estimates for each year. In addition, we trace trends over time within immigrant populations, comparing the experiences of immigrants from Latin America with that of Africans and Eastern Europeans after 1989 and the experiences of the undocumented with those of the documented. We also follow cohorts over time to see how their well-being changes with time.

References:

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