

PRESS RELEASE:

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***What impact has the recession had on immigration?
Which U.S. cities have the highest assimilation rates?
How assimilated are Muslim immigrants in the United States and Europe?
Is there a model country for immigration policy?***

United States Ahead of Europe, Canada on Top In Immigrant Assimilation

New York, NY: On Tuesday, May 24, 2011, the Manhattan Institute's Center for State and Local Leadership released the third installment of its Index of Immigrant Assimilation. The report, "Comparing Immigrant Assimilation in North America and Europe," is authored by adjunct fellow and Duke University professor Jacob Vigdor. The index provides the most detailed estimates to date of the assimilation levels in the United States, Canada, and nine European countries.

The United States consistently ranks among the most successful nations at assimilating immigrants. Only Canada, which follows a very distinct immigration policy defined by strong emphasis on workplace skills, a short waiting period for citizenship, and a liberal attitude toward dual citizenship, consistently outranks the United States.

This report places the contemporary debate about American immigration policy in perspective. As divisive as immigration policy sometimes seems in the United States, European nations generally face more severe challenges in integrating their immigrant populations. The strains felt in European nations, which report their own problems with illegal immigration (Italy and Spain) and cultural integration (Switzerland and France), appear upon close inspection to be more severe than those the United States has experienced.

Developed nations that successfully integrate newcomers enjoy distinct advantages. Immigration helps nations guard against the fiscal and demographic effects of declining fertility rates. A nation that establishes itself as the destination-of-choice for highly skilled and entrepreneurial migrants stands to benefit in the form of economic growth.

The report's key findings include the following:

- **The economic downturn has affected recent and long-term immigrants alike;** however, recent immigrants with strong cultural differences from the mainstream are the ones most likely to have responded to the recession by leaving the country.
- **The immigrant population is now more assimilated than it was a decade ago,** despite a growth of 25 percent in the foreign-born population over the same time period. Much of the gain results directly from weakness in the job market since 2007, which reduced the inflow of newly arrived less-assimilated migrants and increased the outflow of those who had not yet established themselves culturally or economically.
- **Muslims are more assimilated in North America than they are in Europe.** Muslim immigrants are most integrated in Canada followed by the United States. The Muslim assimilation problem in Austria, Greece, Italy, and Switzerland is actually worse than the Mexican assimilation problem in the United States. Muslim immigrants' standing in Spain is roughly equal to the standing of Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States.
- **Immigrants in the nation's largest cities tend to be less assimilated than immigrants across the nation.** Of the 10 largest metropolitan areas that had the largest foreign-born populations in 2009, only New York and Miami met or

exceeded the national index value of 30 in 2009. Of the top 10 immigrant destinations, Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas had a lower assimilation composite score in 2009 than in 1990.

- **Among the 46 metropolitan areas with an immigrant population over 100,000, the most assimilated is:** Honolulu, followed by Tampa, Fort Lauderdale, San Francisco, and Baltimore. The least assimilated metropolitan area is McAllen, Texas (which is adjacent to the Mexican border), followed by Dallas, Fresno, Bakersfield, and Houston.
- **Some surprises:** San Antonio is very close to the top of the most-assimilated metro area list, a clear contrast with other large Texas cities. El Paso and San Diego, both border cities, also do well. Areas surrounding New York City (Nassau county, Bergen and Passaic counties, Newark) do better than the city itself. All of the bottom 10 cities, and 18 of the bottom 20, are located in the Sun Belt. The Rust Belt has 4 entries in the top 10.

The assimilation index is a quantitative measure based on U.S. Census Bureau data. It measures the degree of similarity or distinction between the native-born and foreign-born populations of the United States on a 0 to 100 scale along three dimensions—economic, civic, and cultural.

To read the report visit http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_64.htm. To speak with Jacob Vigdor, please contact Kasia Zabawa at (646) 839-3342 or by email at kzabawa@manhattan-institute.org.

Jacob Vigdor, Ph.D is an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a professor of public policy and economics at Duke University, a faculty research fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and an external research fellow at the Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration. His research interests are in the broad areas of immigration, education policy, housing policy, and political economy. Within those areas, he has published numerous scholarly articles in outlets such as *The Journal of Political Economy*, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, *The Journal of Public Economics*, *The Journal of Human Resources*, and *The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. He received a B.S. in policy analysis from Cornell University in 1994 and a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard University in 1999.

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