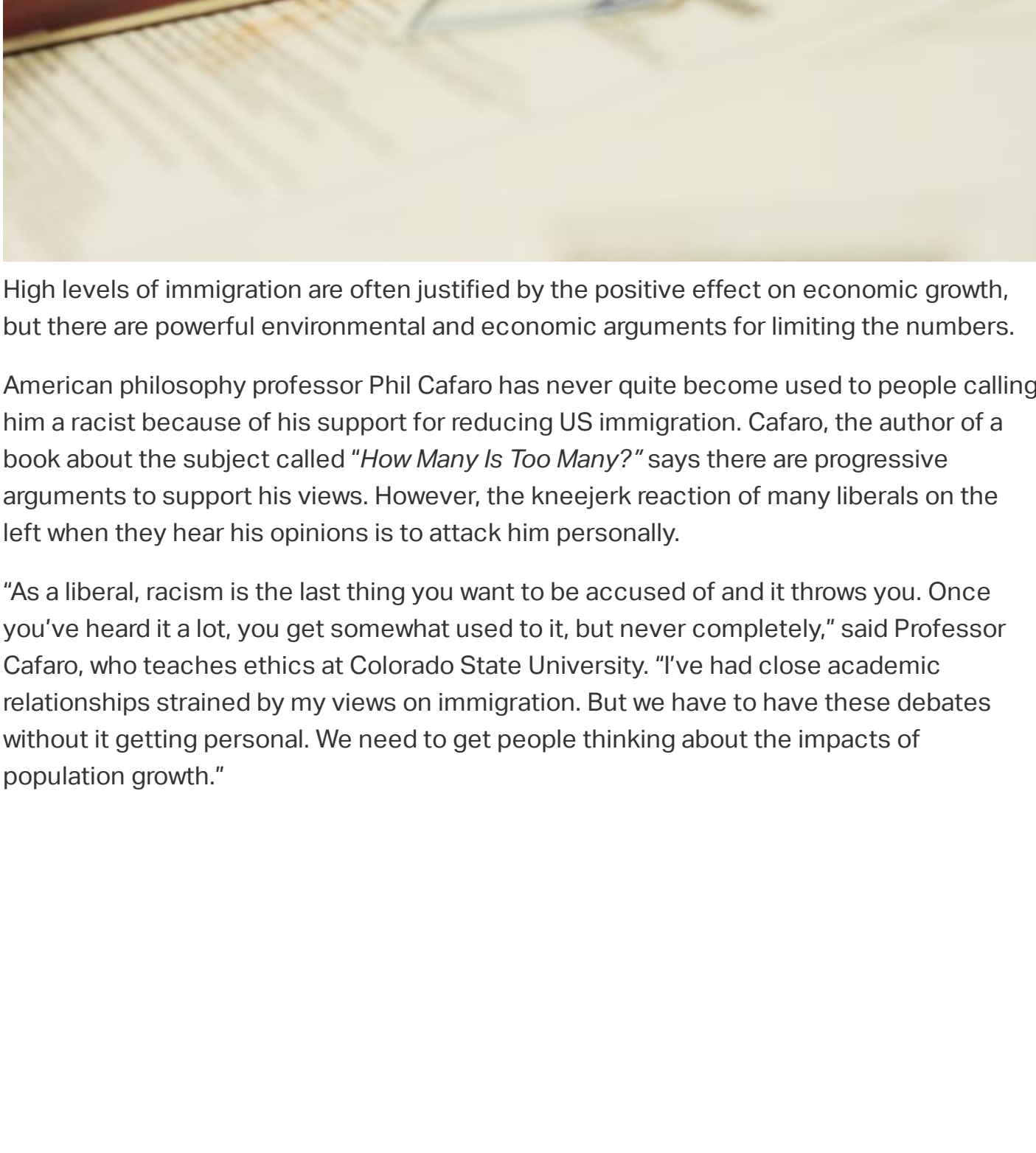




Is there a progressive case for restricting immigration?

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High levels of immigration are often justified by the positive effect on economic growth, but there are powerful environmental and economic arguments for limiting the numbers.

American philosophy professor Phil Cafaro has never quite become used to people calling him a racist because of his support for reducing US immigration. Cafaro, the author of a book about the subject called *"How Many Is Too Many?"* says there are progressive arguments to support his views. However, the kneejerk reaction of many liberals on the left when they hear his opinions is to attack him personally.

"As a liberal, racism is the last thing you want to be accused of and it throws you. Once you've heard it a lot, you get somewhat used to it, but never completely," said Professor Cafaro, who teaches ethics at Colorado State University. "I've had close academic relationships strained by my views on immigration. But we have to have these debates without it getting personal. We need to get people thinking about the impacts of population growth."

Most of Cafaro's colleagues believe a pro-immigration stance is consistent with progressive political leanings. Cafaro shares most of their political ideals, which is why his stance on immigration discombobulates them. He also values the economic security of workers, supports greater wage equality, demands stronger environmental-protection laws and wants to end racial discrimination. His political heroes include the three

Roosevelts - Teddy, Franklin, and Eleanor, as well as Rachel Carson and Martin Luther King Jr.

Cafaro is against high US levels of legal immigration for two reasons. First, he says population growth is bad for the environment. Second, easy access to cheap labour causes a downward suppression on wages and increases unemployment.

Contrary to widespread belief, most US immigration comes from the nationally mandated level of 1.1 million annually. Illegal immigration is harder to track, but estimates suggest around 200,000 to 300,000 per year. The total level of immigration is four times higher here than anywhere else in the world. Another important consideration is that the vast majority of immigrants are less-skilled and less-educated workers. According to one study, from 1980 to 1995, immigration increased the number of college graduates in the workforce by 4%, but increased the number of workers without a high school diploma by 21%.

"We've seen labour markets flooded with less-skilled workers, driving down wages and causing benefits to be slashed. Helped by immigrant replacement workers, employers have weakened the unions and long-term unemployment among poorer Americans has greatly increased," he said.

Professor Cafaro says academic evidence supports his views. Harvard's George Borjas, an expert on the economic impacts of immigration, says that during the 1970s and 1980s, each immigration-driven 10% increase in the number of workers in a particular economic field in the US decreased wages in that field by an average of 3.5%. More recently, Borjas found that a 10% immigrant-induced increase in the supply of a particular skill group reduced the wages of black workers in that group by 4%, lowered the employment rate of black men by 3.5%, and increased the incarceration rate of blacks by almost 1%.

Meanwhile, analysis by the US Center for Immigration Studies suggests that high immigration disproportionately affects working-class Americans. Immigrants account for 35% of workers in building cleaning and maintenance, but only 10% in the much richer corporate and financial sectors. They make up 24% of workers in construction, but only 8% of teachers and college professors, and just 7% of lawyers.

"The evidence suggests that high immigration correlates closely with increasing unemployment in the low-paid sectors of the economy," said professor Cafaro. "In areas like construction, janitorial services and meat packing, immigrants make up around 25%-30% of the workforce and these are sectors with higher unemployment for Native Americans, whereas if we look at doctors, lawyers and education, there are low rates of immigrant employment of between 5% and 10% and we see much lower levels of unemployment for native Americans."

Wage suppression is also an inevitable consequence. By importing millions of poor people into the US and setting them in competition with other poor people for scarce jobs, it exacerbates economic inequality. "An era of persistently high unemployment seems like precisely the wrong time to expand immigration," Professor Cafaro said.

He advocates a moratorium on non-essential immigration until the unemployment rate declines below 5% for several years, or until real wages rise by 25% for the bottom half of the US labour force. Yet, Professor Cafaro's concern for the impact on working-class Americans is a surprisingly rare concern among progressives. A more common liberal view is that immigration is a good thing because it benefits incomers from the developing world. Cafaro has some sympathy for the argument that the US intervened so heavily in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s that it should take immigrants from those countries.

"But if you take this argument to its logical extreme, it becomes crazy. You would have to say that because the British colonised India they are on the hook for bringing in as many Indians as want to come to the UK. But the answer to improving things for people in India is to improve things for people in India rather than having half of India pick up and move somewhere else," he said.

An alternative immigration system that selects the most skilled applicants from the developing world based on a points system also has its downsides. Even the present US immigration system, with its high intake of the non-skilled creates a brain drain from the developing world to the US. **For example, the number of African doctors working in the US has soared by almost two fifths over a decade, according to a study in the online medical journal PLoS Medicine. This figure is more than the combined number of doctors working in Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.** Moreover, there are high numbers of African doctors working all over Europe. In the UK, for example, there are more than 250 Malawian doctors in Manchester alone. This is more than there are in the entire country of Malawi.

Even more powerful than the economic arguments against high immigration is the environmental case. All the scientific evidence suggests the world needs to control population growth to avoid using up natural resources, polluting the planet and causing species depletion. With 320 million people, the US is the third-most-populous nation on earth. But its high per-capita consumption rates and massive ecological footprint means it can be considered the world's most overpopulated country.

Without high immigration to increase its size, the average US birth of 1.9 per couple would see a gradual decline in the population. However, according to the US Census Bureau, the current level of immigration would cause a rise in numbers to 524 million by 2,100. If immigration increases to 2.225 million per year, the US population would double to 639 million by 2,100.

"We have failed to create a sustainable society for 320 million so how can we create one for hundreds of millions more given our high levels of consumption?" said Professor Cafaro.

The British think-tank Population Matters addresses many of the same concerns. Simon Ross, the organisation's Chief Executive says that, although population growth is an international concern, each country has a duty to address the issue internally.

"Every nation has to do its bit within its own borders, but it's also the responsibility of individual families to have fewer children. Large, unbalanced migration that drives population growth undermines all our efforts on the environment and we can forget about the UK wanting to be sustainable, or conserving resources," he said.

Like Professor Cafaro, Ross has to battle the stigma associated with being against high levels of immigration. In the UK, the right-wing UKIP party has hijacked the debate with a constant stream of anti-immigrant rhetoric. UKIP leader Nigel Farage has repeatedly made incendiary comments about immigrants, such as his infamous claims about Romanians in London. "Any normal and fair-minded person would have a perfect right to be concerned if a group of Romanian people suddenly moved in next door," Farage stated.

"That is not our position at all," said Ross. "We have no view on the cultural aspects. Immigration has become a left-right issue, but we think it goes beyond those polarities. Environmentalists are often concerned about the welfare of animals, or just the beauty of the landscape. Those are not concerns of the right-wing UKIP party, which wants to abandon investments in renewable energy and has questioned the validity of climate change. Population growth is also an issue of social justice. The poorest people will be the most affected as populations rise and resource prices soar. In the UK, the poor are the ones who can't afford houses because there's a shortage of supply and prices have soared."

Ross says the economic growth paradigm is part of the problem. Both in the US and UK, a rise in total GDP is often used to justify high immigration, but the perpetual growth model is irrational and unsustainable. "We have to ask if growth is a good thing. Should we continually be increasing consumption and production when we are trying to limit emissions?" said Ross. "All growth uses up natural resources and causes pollution. We have to oppose a system that pushes us to consume more and more and faster and faster until there is nothing left for grandchildren."

As in the US, the main driver of population growth in the UK is high immigration. The UK population is around 64 million, which represents a rise of about 10 million since the 1960s. But the UK Office for National Statistics predicts that it will reach 73.3 million by 2036. With a national birth rate below two per couple, only net migration will push the numbers higher. At its peak in the year to mid-2005, net inward migration accounted for around 69% of population growth, according to the UK Government.

Professor Cafaro also opposes the obsession with economic growth.

"We're told we need population growth to create jobs for a growing population, but if most of the population growth is coming from immigration, we're saying we need more immigration to deal with all the new people who need jobs. This is a self-perpetuating argument," he said.

A more sensible solution to the problem of an ageing population would be to use put the annual productivity gains from technological improvements back into welfare provisions. "This should be easy, but in practice most of the wealth from increased productivity goes to a small sector of society. If we create a balanced and fairer economy we won't need population growth," he said.

See also: [Data Show an Alarming Drop in Highly Skilled Immigrants to the U.S.](#)



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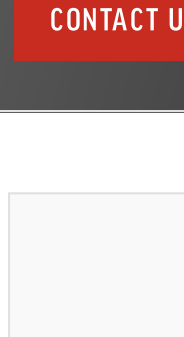
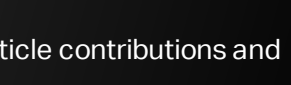
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