

Indians in US make money fast, slow to assimilate: study

Indian immigrants in the US quickly assimilate with society economically but are slow to do so culturally and in civic matters, a new report has found.

In its first annual Index of Immigrant Assimilation released recently, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, a conservative think tank in New York, found that Indians quickly attained the same income levels as native-born Americans.

But on the cultural and civil assimilation indexes, they fared poorly. That is to say that they are much less likely to, say, marry US citizens or join the military.

This dragged down their standing on the composite assimilation index, led by Canadians, Filipinos and Cuban, from among immigrants from 10 nations studied.

In the economic assimilation index by country of origin, Indians stood only a tad lower than the full 100 score achieved by top of the table countries like Canada and Cuba, doing better than China. Mexico and El Salvador were at the bottom.

In cultural assimilation, Indians scored under 40 out of 100, as bad as Chinese. In civic assimilation, the report gave Indians a little over 40 score, with only people from Mexico and El Salvador coming lower. Vietnam topped the table with 75 score, Canada did poorly at about 40.

The index examines the extent to which immigrants of various nationalities assimilate in society as compared to native citizens. Relying on census data from 1900 to 2007, the study looked at indices like the newcomers' increase in earnings, their rate of learning the English language, and progress toward citizenship.

Giving the example of India and China, the study noted that cultural assimilation is not a prerequisite for economic assimilation.

'Immigrants born in China and India show the greatest degree of cultural distinction from the native-born. It is interesting to note that both these groups show average or above-average levels of economic assimilation,' it said.

In contrast, the report said, the least economically assimilated large group, the Mexican-born, posts cultural assimilation levels nearly identical to those of Vietnamese immigrants, who are nearly indistinguishable from the native-born along economic lines.

Although collective assimilation rates are lower than they were a century ago, they are no lower than they have been in recent decades, the report found. As a result, the doubling of foreign born population since the 1990s did not drive down the overall assimilation index of the newcomers, which remained relatively steady from 1990 to 2006.

'This is something unprecedented in US history,' the study's author Jacob L. Vigdor said. 'It shows that the nation's capacity to assimilate new immigrants is strong.'

A possible explanation, Vigdor said, was that the economic expansion of the 1990s created more

job opportunities at all levels, speeding the economic integration of immigrants.

It could also be that because today's immigrants begin at such a low starting point, 'it's easier to make progress to the next level up' of integration than it would be if the immigrant had to improve on an already high level of integration.

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