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Immigration and Jobs Link Is Disputed

By JULIA PRESTON

In the furious debate over immigration, advocates of reducing the inflow have argued that the millions of foreigners who came to the United States in the last decade took jobs from American workers. But a study released yesterday by the Pew Hispanic Center found that there was no evidence to support that claim for the country as a whole.

The study, based on Census Bureau data, found that 14 states with high immigration rates after 1990, including Texas, Nevada and Georgia, also had higher-than-average employment rates for American-born workers. Those 14 states accounted for 24 percent of American workers.

But in eight states that had big increases in immigrants in the same period, among them Arizona and Tennessee, employment rates for American workers were below average. Those states were home to 15 percent of American workers.

The study concluded that there was no consistent link between surging growth in immigration and declines in employment for Americans.

“We find no pattern,” Rakesh Kochhar, the author of the study, said. “We cannot say with certainty that the growth of the foreign-born population has either hurt or helped native-born workers.”

Even in the recession and slow recovery since 2001, there was no consistent pattern to show that increases in immigration hurt the job prospects of American workers across the country, the study found.

Instead, Mr. Kochhar said, the pace of economic growth in a state was more likely to determine whether American workers lost out in competition with immigrants. The study did not address the impact of immigration on wages.

The Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization in Washington that does not make policy recommendations. In the study, Mr. Kochhar looked at census data from 1990, 2000 and 2004 to chart the increase in immigrant populations in the states and the employment of American-born workers in 2000 and 2004.

The study confirmed that the boom of the 90’s brought surges in immigration to states that had not seen such intense flows, including Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina where immigrant populations increased more than 200 percent.

From 2000 to 2004, the study found, increases in immigrants coincided with high employment rates for American workers in 27 states and the District of Columbia, which encompassed 67 percent of workers born in the United States.

“The findings are entirely plausible, contradicting a notion that immigrants are broadly hurting native-born workers,” said Jared Bernstein, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, a nonpartisan group that focuses on low-wage workers. But Mr. Bernstein cautioned against minimizing the impact on Americans who did face a struggle against foreign workers.

“There certainly are places in this country where native-born workers are hurt by immigrant competition,” he said. “The fact that it doesn’t hurt in a national sense should not lead us to dismiss local problems.”