

HB 56 analysis: Alabama immigration may not be down since new law started

Yanyi K. Djamba

Montgomery Advertiser

June 6, 2013

Since Alabama passed the immigration law known as HB 56, many people feared the state's economy would be negatively affected.

One key argument has been that thousands of undocumented immigrants would leave and their departure would have negative impacts on the state's economy, especially in farming and other low paying jobs primarily occupied by immigrants.

Others welcomed HB 56 as a way of saving money by eliminating public benefits to illegal immigrants and their families.

However, there is no consensus on the demographic impact of the new immigration law.

Nobody knows exactly how many immigrants live in Alabama or the United States. However, scientific estimations from various data sources can give reliable numbers of people who move in or out of the state and country in a given year.

Comparing two years of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual data cycle, which covers the period between July 1 and June 30, it is possible to begin examining the potential impact of HB 56.

The first year, July 1, 2010-June 30, 2011, represents the pre-HB 56 period. The second year, July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012 is the first post-HB 56 data period.

To assess the demographic impact of HB 56, we need to compare the migration rates between these two periods.

Before the implementation of the HB 56 law (July 1, 2010-June 30, 2011), Alabama had a net annual migration of 5,157 people, which includes both domestic and international immigrants. That number represents 0.11 percent of the state population.

Compared to other states and Washington DC, Alabama ranked 29th in percent of immigrants.

Washington, DC, was No. 1 with 1.42 percent of its population being composed of immigrants.

Illinois was at the bottom of the list with a negative value of -0.30 percent.

During the first year of HB 56 (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012) Alabama had a net annual migration of 5,872, representing 0.12 percent of the state population.

Compared to other states and Washington DC, Alabama ranked 25th.

During that period, North Dakota became No. 1 with 1.67 percent, followed by Washington DC with 1.42 percent. Illinois remained at the bottom of the list with -0.34 percent .

The comparison of Alabama's net annual migration data shows the state realized an increase in the number of immigrants during the first year of HB 56 compared to the pre-HB 56 period.

Based on these figures, one can argue that the HB 56 law has not yet had negative effects on the number of immigrants entering the state.

Further analysis of Alabama's immigration data by place of origin shows that during the pre-HB 56 year, both domestic and international migrations contributed to the state's net migration.

However, in the first year of the implementation of HB 56, the state's net annual migration was primarily due to international immigration, or people moving from overseas directly to the state of Alabama.

In terms of the size of the net annual immigrant population relative to the total state population, only Mississippi decreased between the two periods (from -0.11 percent in 2010-2011, to -0.12 percent in 2011-2012).

The rest of the states, including Alabama, added more people through immigration during the period of July 2011 — June 2012 than in July 2010 — June 2011.

Interestingly, between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012, the demographic contribution of migration in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi came largely from international immigration, not domestic migration, whereas the opposite was observed in Florida and Tennessee.

This analysis suggests the demographic impact of Alabama's HB 56 immigration law is not yet observed in the way most people would expect.

Yanyi K. Djamba is director of the Center for Demographic Research and professor of sociology at Auburn Montgomery. The center's website is www.demographics.aum.edu.