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America's Got Immigrant Talent

Children of immigrants are dominating U.S. scientific contests.

This week's Regeneron Science Talent Search—also referred to as the Junior Nobel Prize—will feature advances from America's brightest young minds. One observation meriting citation is that the ranks of prodigies are increasingly dominated by progeny of immigrants. Note to GOP restrictionists: Immigration literally spawns innovation.

National Foundation for American Policy executive director Stuart Anderson visited last year's science competition and interviewed its 40 finalists and their parents. He reports some of his jaw-dropping findings in a [new study](#) he's releasing this week. Lo, 83% of last year's finalists were children of immigrants, up from 60% in 2004, and three quarters had parents who worked in the U.S. on an H-1B (high-skilled worker) visa.

Nearly 70% of finalists had a parent who came to the country as an international student and then stayed to work and raise families. While most of the finalists' parents immigrated from India (14 of 40) or China (11), some came from Canada, Cyprus, Iran, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Nigeria. Ingenuity and its genetic antecedents span the globe.

Seven of last year's nine winners were children of immigrants. Amol Punjabi, who took first place in the basic research category, developed software that pharmaceutical companies could use to fight cancer and heart disease. Maya Varma—who is proficient in five programming languages—won the prize for innovation with a smartphone-based lung-function diagnostic tool that is as accurate as lab devices. She created the device from \$35 of hobbyist electronics and free computer design tools. More than 95% of winners have traditionally pursued science as a career, and 70% have gone on to earn doctorate or medical degrees.

One question the study raises is why children of immigrants are outperforming native Americans in technical fields. Mr. Anderson observes that immigrant parents may be more likely to cultivate in their children values such as perseverance, independence, a love of learning and interest in innovation.

Mr. Anderson documented [last year](#) that immigrants have founded more than half of American start-ups valued at \$1 billion or more. Each immigrant founder created an average of 760 jobs per company. Consider the tens of thousands of jobs created by Tesla's Elon Musk (South Africa) and Udacity's Sebastian Thrun (Germany), who also pioneered Google's self-driving car.

Most research universities and tech companies depend on immigrants (and their high-skilled progeny), which is why the push by some Republicans to limit H-1B visas is economically damaging. Importing high-skilled workers is a long-run investment that creates jobs for American workers today and will produce future entrepreneurs who do likewise.

Famous children of immigrants include Peter Thiel, Steve Jobs and Bobby Murphy, the co-founder of Snap. Unlike Keynesian stimulus spending, immigration really is an economic multiplier.