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Describing Immigrant Communities

Randy Capps, Jeffrey S. Passel

Immigration Studies Program
The Urban Institute

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This presentation includes results from past and present work (in some cases still being drafted) on immigrant populations using several data sources for national, state and local-level analyses. Much of this work has been supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, although other foundations and federal agencies contributing funding to support the work as well.

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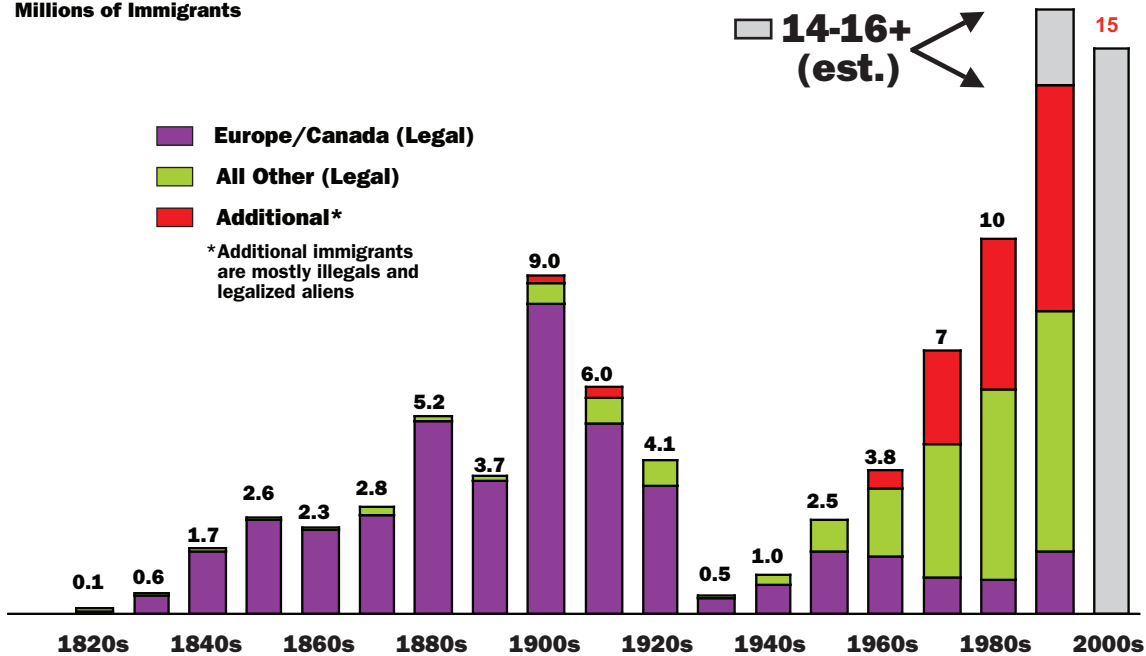
A full copy of [The New Neighbors](#) can be obtained from the Urban Institute website (www.urban.org) or by contacting the authors at the Urban Institute (Please see last slide in this presentation).





Current In-Flows are Very High

Millions of Immigrants



This presentation begins with the large scale of recent immigration flows to the United States.

Although some uncertainty remains over the number of immigrants coming to the United States during the 1990s, there are indications that at least 14 million and perhaps as many as 16 million immigrants entering the country during the decade (according to our estimates based on Census 2000); this figure far exceeds flows in any decade in the nation's history.

Given the overall levels of legal immigration (about 800,000 or so per year), it is likely that the net in-flow of undocumented immigrants averaged about 500,000 per year over the decade, but the level of undocumented entries was much higher, since many undocumented immigrants return to their home countries. Legal immigration averaged close to 1 million per year during the 1990s.

Barring a major change in the nation's immigration policy or a sustained deterioration in the economy, we project the entry of at least another 15 million immigrants between 2000 and 2010.

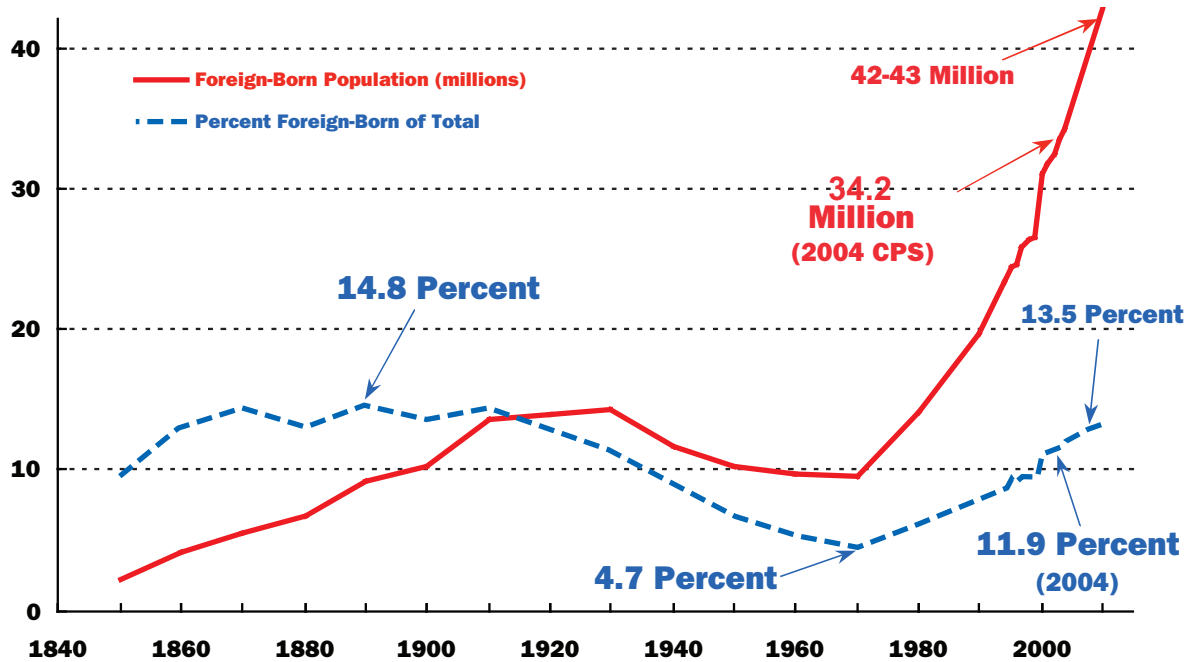
The pattern of immigration before the 1960s reflects economic upturns and downturns of the U.S. economy and those of major sending areas. Other fluctuations can be traced to wars and restrictions in U.S. policy. For instance, U.S. immigration fell substantially following the National Origin Quotas Act of 1924, which substantially reduced legal immigration from Europe and Asia. The two decades with the least immigration were the 1930s and 1940s, immediately following this legislation and corresponding with the Great Depression and World War II.

In 1965, the National Origin Quotas were repealed, legal immigration quotas were increased substantially, and a new system emphasizing family reunification was enacted. Since then, increasing immigration flows have proved largely impervious to changes in economic conditions and foreign wars, although flows have decreased somewhat since September 11, 2001.

Sources: Department of Homeland Security Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (various years); Urban Institute estimates and projections.



Immigrant Numbers at Peak — Percentage is Not



This chart depicts the “stock” of immigrants in the United States—in other words, the foreign-born population—from 1850 through 2004 with a projection to 2010.

The foreign-born population had reached 31.1 million by the time of the 2000 Census and by 2004 had increased to more than 34 million—an all-time high. (The chart suggests a very rapid increase in the late 1990s, but the true growth trajectory is probably smoother with the rapid change at the end of the decade representing significant improvements in measurement between the Current Population Surveys of the late 1990s and the 2000 Census.)

The sustained rapid growth and high levels of immigration, shown in the previous chart, have led to the foreign-born population more than tripling in only 30 years, shown in this chart.

The percentage of the total population that is foreign-born was about 12 percent in 2004—more than double the 4.7 percent in 1970. That said, the 1970 levels are probably the lowest in the history of the country (certainly the lowest since we have data).

Looking ahead a decade, we project that the the foreign-born population will rise to more than 40 million, representing more than 13 percent of the total population—a level that remains below the historical peak of almost 15 percent at the time of the last great wave of immigration.



Citizenship and Legal Status Definitions

Legal permanent residents = noncitizens admitted for permanent residency (“green card” holders)

Naturalized citizens = immigrants who have become U.S. citizens

Undocumented immigrants = entered illegally or overstayed visas

Refugees = admitted for “well founded fear of persecution”

This slide defines the four large legal status groups that we usually describe when analyzing the U.S. immigrant population: legal permanent residents, naturalized citizens, undocumented immigrants, and refugees. There are also small numbers of immigrants who are in the United States legally on a temporary basis (e.g., students and temporary workers).

Legal permanent residents (LPRs, also known as “green card” holders) are admitted through family reunification provisions (for instance, parents, spouses or children of U.S. citizens), employment provisions and several other smaller categories. They may also have their status adjusted, for instance from refugee, after living in the United States for some time. After five years—three years in the case of those married to U.S. citizens—LPRs are eligible to become U.S. citizens, but they must first apply and pass background checks, civics and English tests.

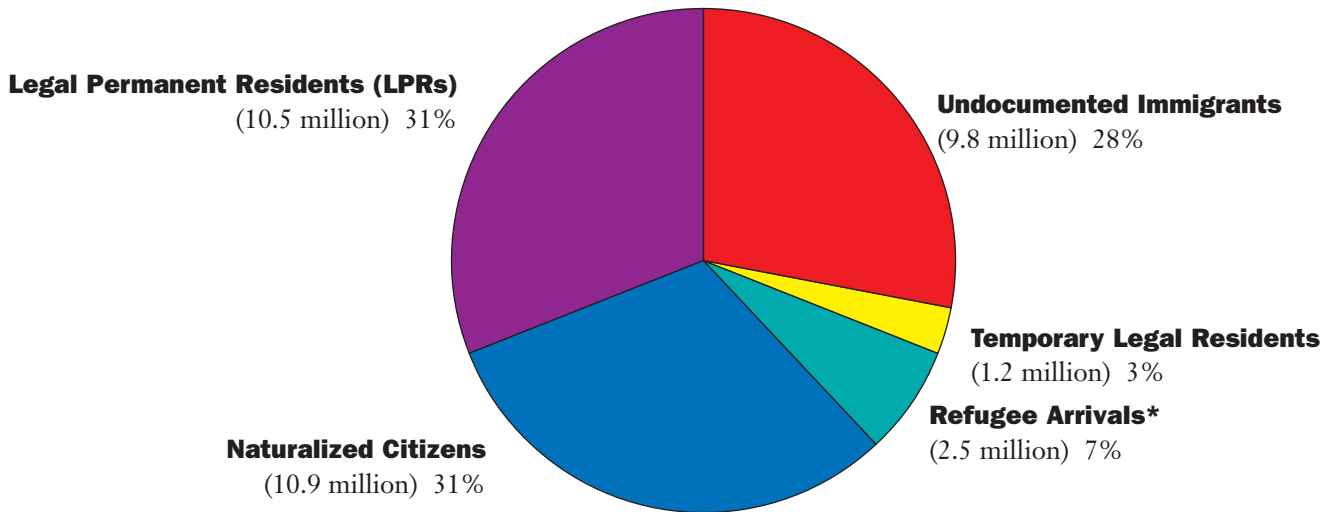
Naturalized citizens are those LPRs who have passed the test and become U.S. citizens (or children who became citizens when their parents became citizens).

Undocumented immigrants are those who overstayed valid temporary visas (for instance, student or tourist visas) or who entered the U.S. illegally, often across the border with Mexico.

Refugees are those who were admitted to the United States based on a well-founded fear of persecution, and represent a relatively small share of the total.



Undocumented over One Quarter of Immigrants



34.9 Million Foreign-Born in 2003

(Urban Institute Estimates based in part on March 2003 Current Population Survey)

In 2003, there were roughly equal numbers of legal permanent residents and naturalized citizens: almost 11 million of each. A substantial share of the foreign-born population (9.8 million or 28 percent) was undocumented, and a smaller share (2.5 million or 7 percent) was made up of refugees (This includes refugees who have become LPRs or U.S. citizens). Another 3 percent of foreign-born residents were “legal temporary residents,” visitors such as students and temporary workers.

The undocumented population has been steadily increasing in size (and possibly by large increments since the late 1990s). Similarly, the naturalized citizen population has grown rapidly in recent years as increasing numbers of legal immigrants have become eligible and taken advantage of the opportunity to become U.S. citizens. The LPR population, on the other hand, has actually not changed much or decreased as the number who have naturalized (or left the U.S. or died) has exceeded the number being admitted in recent years.

Please note that the estimate of the overall size of the immigrant population shown in this slide—34.9 million—is about 1.4 million higher than the 2003 March Current Population Survey (33.5 million). We assume that the Current Population Survey undercounted immigrants by about 1.4 million, many of whom are undocumented.



Who Comes to the U.S.?

Legal permanent residents:

(700,000 -1 million per year)

Refugees:

45,000 (down from 100,000)

Undocumented immigrants:

Early '90s — 200-300,000 per year

Late '90s — 500-800,000 or more

Current — ??? Less, but High

This slides provides our best estimates of the current level of annual in-flow for legal immigrants and humanitarian admissions and the net annual increase in the undocumented population.

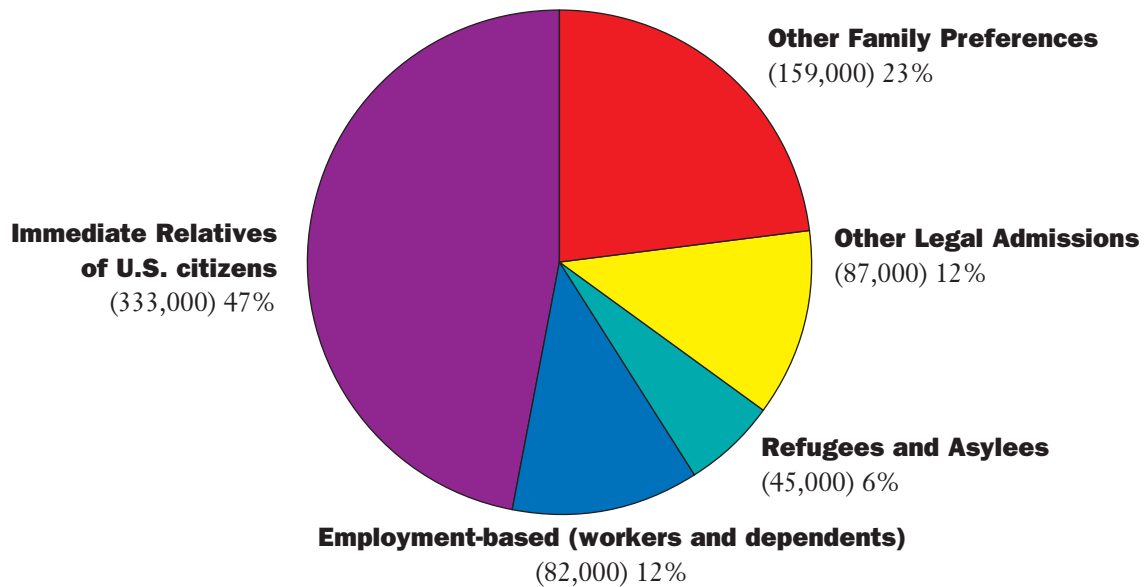
Most of the 700,000 to 1 million legal permanent residents are admitted for family unification purposes; a smaller share are admitted for employment reasons. During the mid-1990s, LPR admissions averaged between 600,000 and 900,000 each year. In federal fiscal years 2000 through 2002, total LPR admissions exceeded 1 million, but the larger numbers were due in part to clearance of backlogs caused by processing delays in previous years. By fiscal year 2003, LPR admissions fell back to about 700,000, in part because backlogs and delays began to reappear. We do not know yet whether the 2003 figures represent an aberration or a return to the slightly more modest levels of legal immigration experienced during the mid-1990s.

The number of refugees admitted has declined substantially in recent years (Refugees are first admitted with “refugee” status and later apply for legal permanent residency). While the State Department and the Congress have set a ceiling of 70,000 annual refugees, only 25,000 refugees were admitted in fiscal year 2003 (October 2002 through September 2003), down from 70,000 to 100,000 each year during the 1990s (Refugee admissions exceeded the ceiling during the late 1990s).

We estimate that the flow of undocumented immigrants to the U.S. more than doubled between the early and late 1990s, from 200-300,000 to over 500,000 annually. We do not have good estimates of the flows following September 11, 2001, but annual apprehensions along the U.S. border with Mexico were about a third lower during 2002 through 2004 than they were during fiscal year 2000.



Admissions Status of Legal Immigrants



706,000 Legal Admissions, Fiscal Year 2003

(Department of Homeland Security, 2003 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics)

Legal immigration levels have fallen somewhat since the events of September 11, 2001. The main emphasis in legal immigration remains on family reunification. Although most legal and undocumented immigrants are employed, U.S. immigration policy places little emphasis on education, job skills, or employment as criteria for admissions.

About 700,000 immigrants were admitted legally during fiscal year 2003 (October 2002 through September 2003). This represents a substantial drop from 2000-2002, when over 1 million legal immigrants were admitted each year, but about the same level as the mid-1990s. We do not know yet whether the decline in 2003 is a one time drop, or whether legal immigration will remain at lower levels for some time to come.

As shown in this chart, over two thirds of legal immigrants were admitted under family preferences: 47 percent as immediate relatives (spouses, parents and children) of U.S. citizens, and another 23 percent as other relatives of U.S. citizens and legal immigrants.

In fiscal year 2003, about 45,000 refugees and asylees were admitted as legal permanent residents. This number was down substantially from an average over 100,000 per year during 2000-2002. Other legal admissions—including some “diversity” visas to countries underrepresented in the family reunification totals—numbered almost 90,000 in fiscal year 2003.

The total number of immigrants admitted for permanent residency based on employment was 82,000 in fiscal year 2003, only 12 percent of total legal admissions. Half of these immigrants were admitted directly for employment, and the other half were dependents (spouses and children) of workers. This figure also represents a drop in employment admissions from the average for 2000-2002, which was about 175,000.



Temporary “Nonimmigrant” Admissions: Fiscal Year 2003

27,800,000	Total Nonimmigrants
24,400,000	Tourists
4,200,000	Visitors for Business
662,000	Students & dependent
798,000	Temporary Workers & dependents

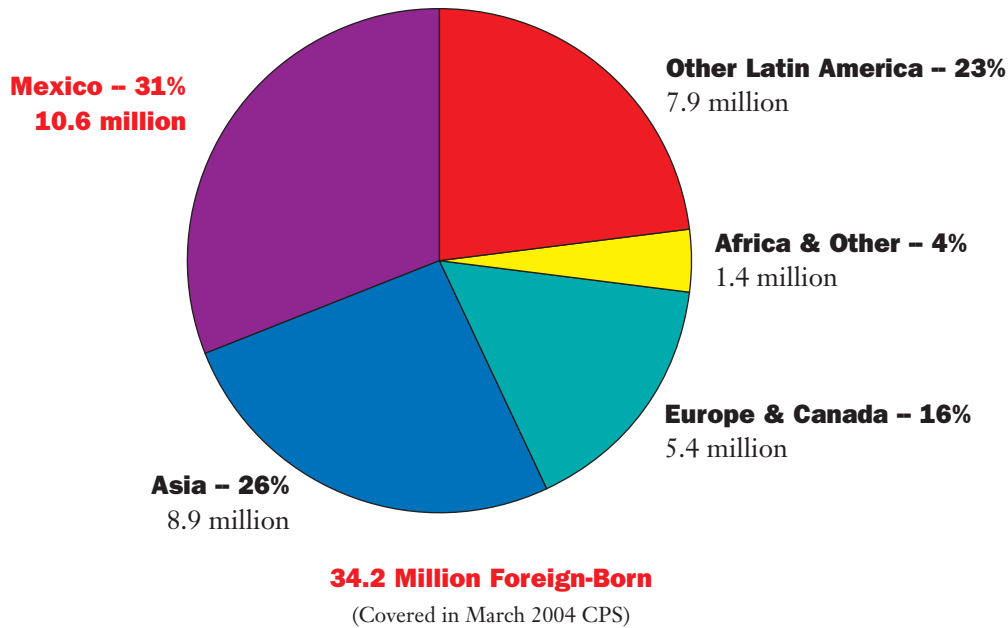
(Department of Homeland Security, 2003 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics)

This chart shows the total number of temporary or “nonimmigrant” admissions during federal fiscal year 2003 (October 2002 through September 2003), when almost 28 million visitors were admitted to the United States legally. (More than a million attempted to enter the country illegally, and were apprehended at one of the borders or ports of entry.) The vast majority—over 24 million—were admitted as tourists. A substantial share—over 4 million—were admitted as visitors for business purposes (usually meetings and conferences). Over 650,000 were admitted as students and their dependents (i.e., spouses and children), and almost 800,000 as temporary workers and their dependents.

The number of temporary visitors has fallen somewhat from a peak of 33.7 million in fiscal year 2000. Most of the drop has been among tourists, although anecdotally, the number of tourists rebounded somewhat in 2004. The number of foreign students and dependents fell from a peak of 168,000 in fiscal year 2001, and by all accounts continues to decline.



Latin Americans & Asians Dominate Foreign-Born



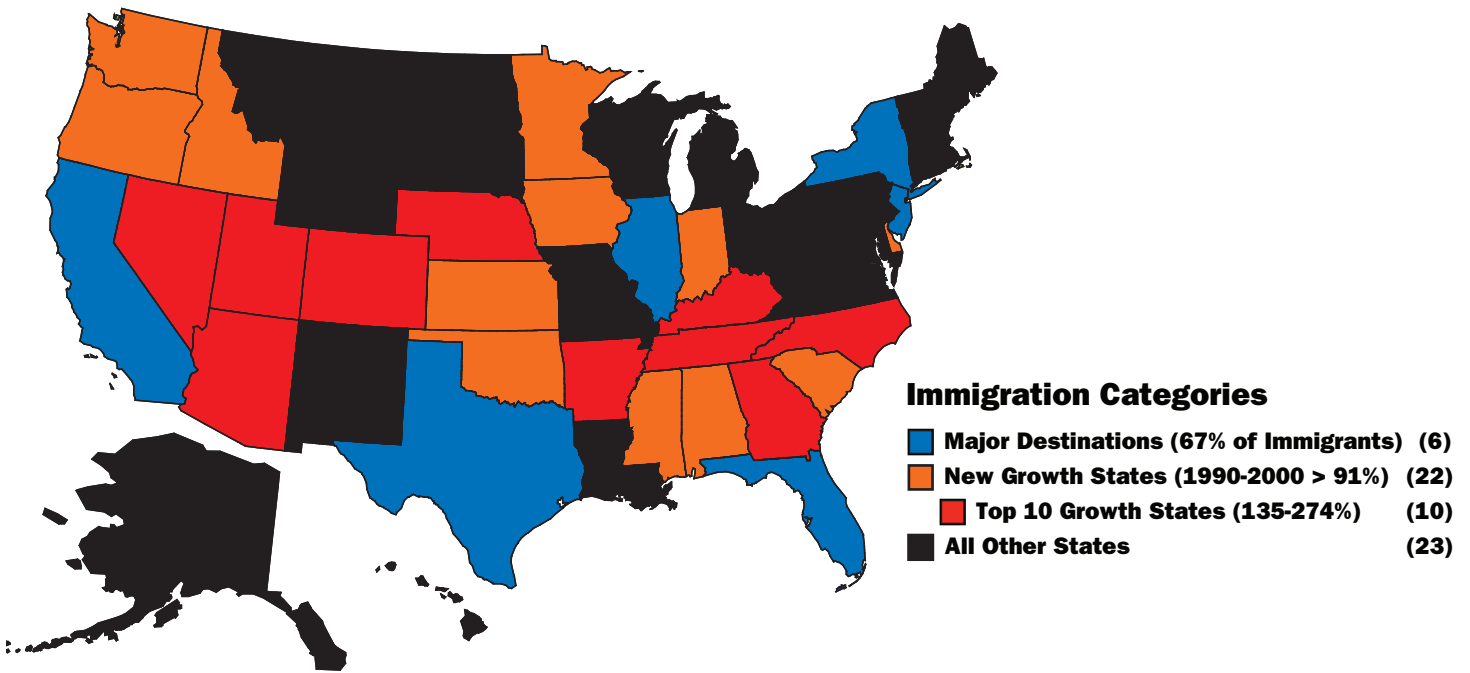
This chart displays the foreign-born population by major country and region of birth, using data from the March 2004 Current Population Survey. Please note that the total immigrant population displayed here—34.2 million—is not adjusted for undercount.

Latin Americans are half of all immigrants living in the United States, and Mexico alone accounts for 31 percent (10.6 million persons). This degree of concentration is not unprecedented as over 30 percent of the foreign-born population in the mid- and late-19th century came from Ireland or Germany (Some decades had more than 30 percent of each.)

The other two principal sources are: Asia—8.9 million or 26 percent of the total; and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean (everything south of the U.S. other than Mexico)—7.9 million or 23 percent. The traditional source regions of Europe and Canada—which accounted for the lion’s share of immigration before 1970—have dropped to 5.4 million or only 16 percent of the total, a share that seems to be steadily decreasing.



New Immigration Growth Centers



One important demographic story of the 1990s was the dispersal of the immigrant population to states and communities with limited experience and infrastructure for settling newcomers.

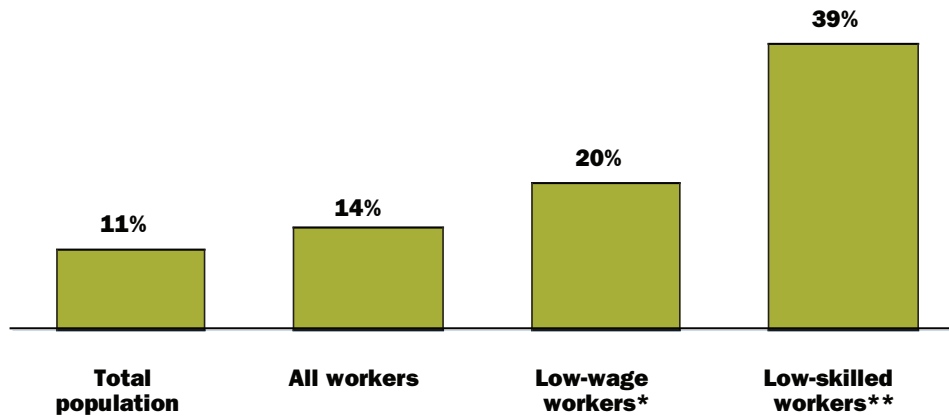
Prior to 1995 the six major destination states (CA, NY, TX, FL, IL, and NJ) shown here in dark blue had roughly three-quarters of the nation's immigrant population for several decades. That share declined somewhat during the late 1990s and today only about two-thirds of the immigrant population live in these six states.

Especially rapid growth occurred during the 1990s in the 22 "new growth" states shown here in red (or medium shade if in black and white); growth was particularly rapid during the last half of the 1990s. New growth states are defined as those where the immigrant population grew faster than in Texas during the 1990s (At 91 percent, Texas was the fastest growing of the six major destination states). The new growth states are located in a wide band across the middle of the country, and include many of the Rocky Mountain, Midwest and Southeastern states. The fastest growth rates occurred in the 10 states shown here in solid red. Despite rapid growth, many of these states still have relatively small, total immigrant populations.

Unlike the major destination states, the immigrant population in the new growth states is disproportionately made up of recent arrivals—almost 60 percent arrived in the 1990s, most since 1995. Recency of arrival is correlated with a higher share undocumented, lower average income, and limited English language skills.



One in Five Low Wage Workers Is an Immigrant



*** Low-wage workers earned less than twice the minimum wage in 2001.**

**** Low-skilled workers have less than a high school education.**

(2001-2002 Current Population Survey)

The primary means of integration for immigrants is through the U.S. economy, and immigrants are over-represented in the labor force, especially at the low end.

In 2001-2002, immigrants were about one in nine of the total U.S. population, but one in seven of all workers.

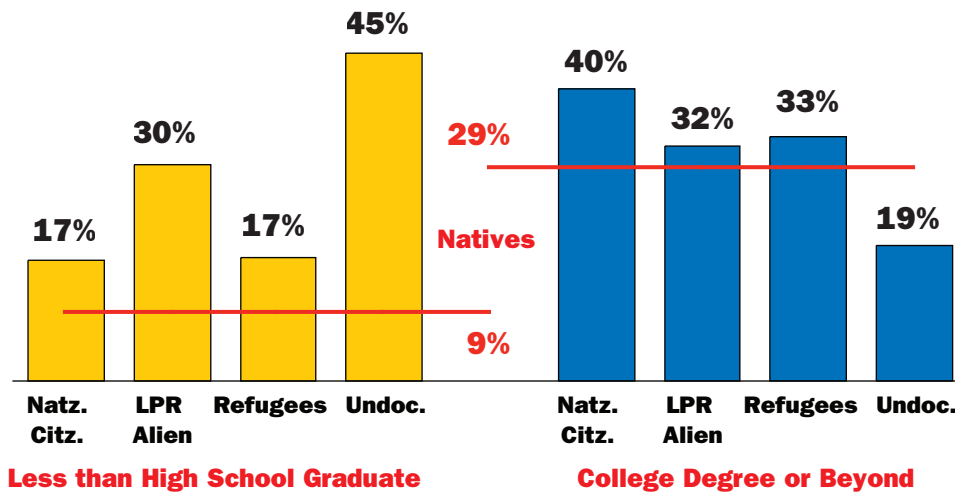
Immigrants were one in five low-wage workers and two in five low-skilled workers. We define low-wage workers as those earning less than twice the minimum wage (which is set by the federal government and by some of the states). Low-skilled workers have not completed secondary school (in other words, they lack a high school diploma).

The overrepresentation of immigrants in the lower earning and lower educational attainment categories offers challenges for their integration. As education becomes more important in a competitive global economy, those workers without a high school degree or technical skills are increasingly left behind in lower-paying jobs with fewer opportunities for upward mobility. Immigrants are an increasing share of U.S. workers who are trapped in these low productivity, low-wage jobs.



Immigrant Education “Hourglass” and the Native “Diamond”

Percent of Persons Aged 25-64 Years, 2002 (Recent Immigrants, Entered 1992 or Later)



This chart depicts shares of U.S. workers without a secondary education (the yellow bars on the left) and shares with a four-year college degree or more (the blue bars on the right). Immigrants tend to be over-represented at both extremes relative to natives (shown in the red line).

Naturalized immigrants and refugees are about twice as likely as natives to lack a high school degree (17 versus 9 percent), while the rate for legal permanent residents is more than three times as high for natives (30 versus 9 percent). Almost half (45 percent) of undocumented immigrants lack a high school diploma (Note these figures are for immigrants entering the United States in 1992 or later, in other words 10 years before the survey was taken in 2002).

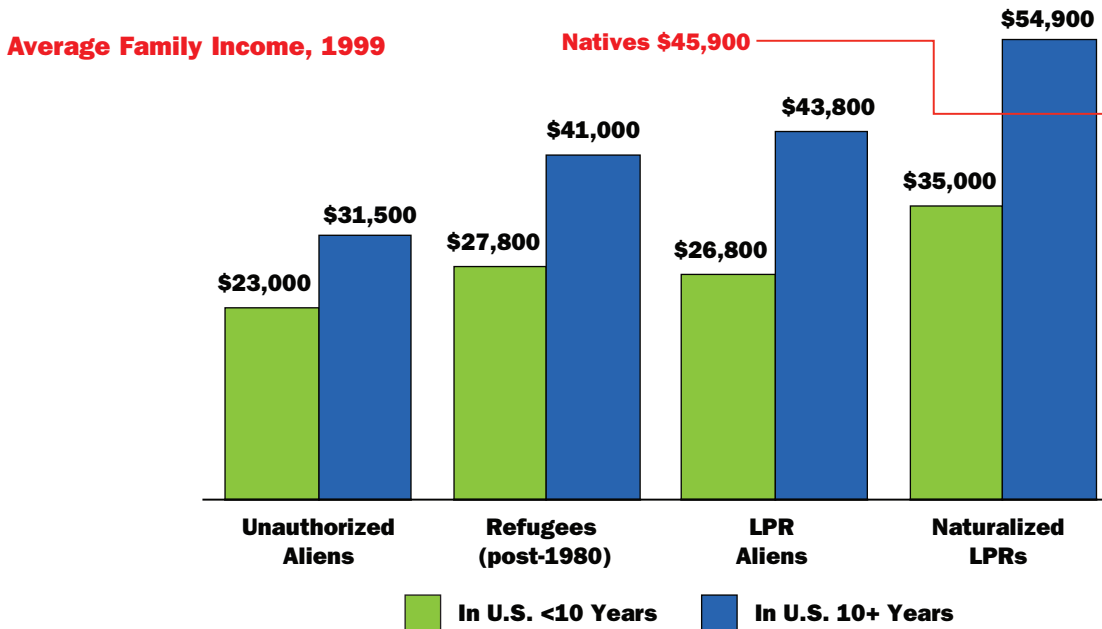
At the high end of the spectrum, naturalized citizens and legal immigrants are slightly more likely than natives to have a four-year college degree or more (and rates with professional degrees are significantly higher). This is not the case, however, for undocumented immigrants.

Thus a significant share of legal immigrants have the credentials necessary to integrate successfully into the U.S. economy. But a larger share, particularly among the undocumented, are at a significant disadvantage without a high school diploma.

Thus programs to increase the educational attainment of immigrants—particularly through higher education but also through basic education and job skills training—are an important strategy to aid in their integration.



Incomes Increase with Time in U.S.



Source: Census 2000

This chart shows that the longer they reside in the United States, the higher the income for most immigrants. Among legal permanent residents, family income rises to reach near parity with natives (shown here in the red line) after about 10 years. Those immigrants who have become naturalized citizens and lived in the United States at least 10 years actually have higher family incomes than U.S.-born natives, by about \$10,000 on average. (In this slide the lighter, yellow bars represent immigrants arriving within 10 years before the survey was taken; the darker, blue bars are immigrants who have been in the country for more than 10 years).

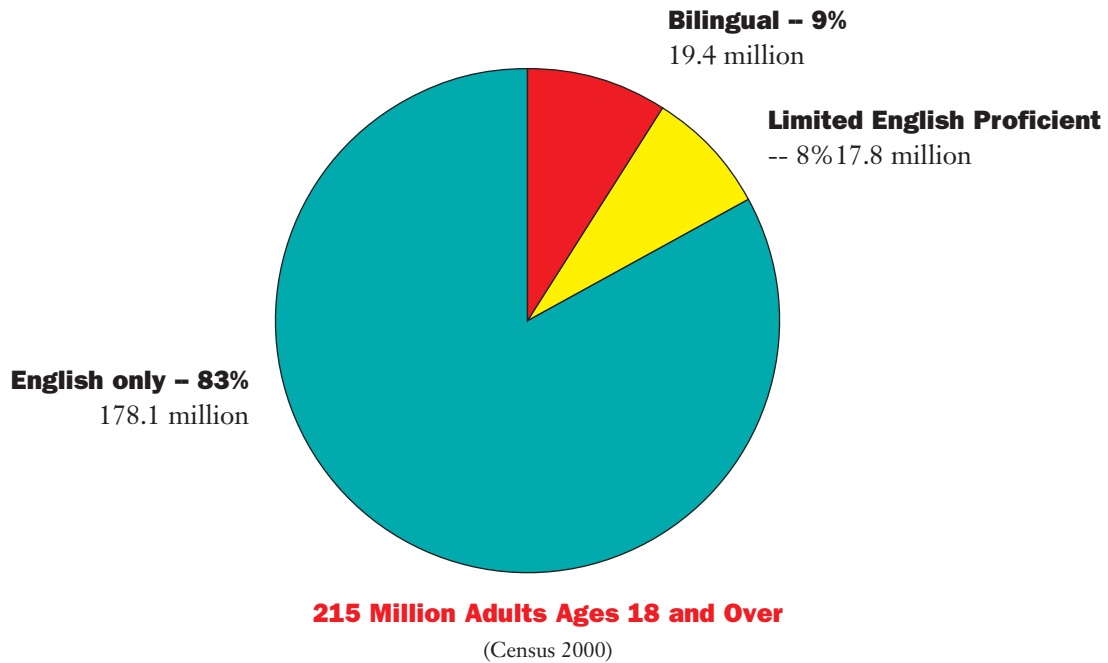
Family income also rises for refugees, but remains slightly lower than that for natives.

Undocumented immigrants also show some progress over time; however, their income remains at about two-thirds of average income for natives even after 10 years in the country.

Thus economic integration occurs at a reasonably fast pace for the average legal immigrant family, but somewhat more slowly for refugees. The undocumented, who represent over a quarter of all U.S. immigrants, show the slowest improvement, suggesting that their lack of legal status is a serious impediment to economic integration.



One in Six U.S. Adults Speaks a Non-English Language



Another important factor in integration is English language acquisition. The vast majority of all adults in the United States (83 percent) only speak English, and almost business is transacted in English outside of New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and a handful of other major cities.

Only about 17 percent of all adults speak a language other than English in the home, and of these about half speak English very well. We term this group (about 20 million people) “bilingual.”

Another 18 million adults do not speak English very well; we term them “limited English proficient” (LEP). Immigrants with limited English skills are at a serious disadvantage in the labor force and generally in terms of their interaction with U.S. society.



Almost Half of All Immigrant Workers are LEP

Percent of Full-Time Workers (Ages 25 and Over) Who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) : 2000

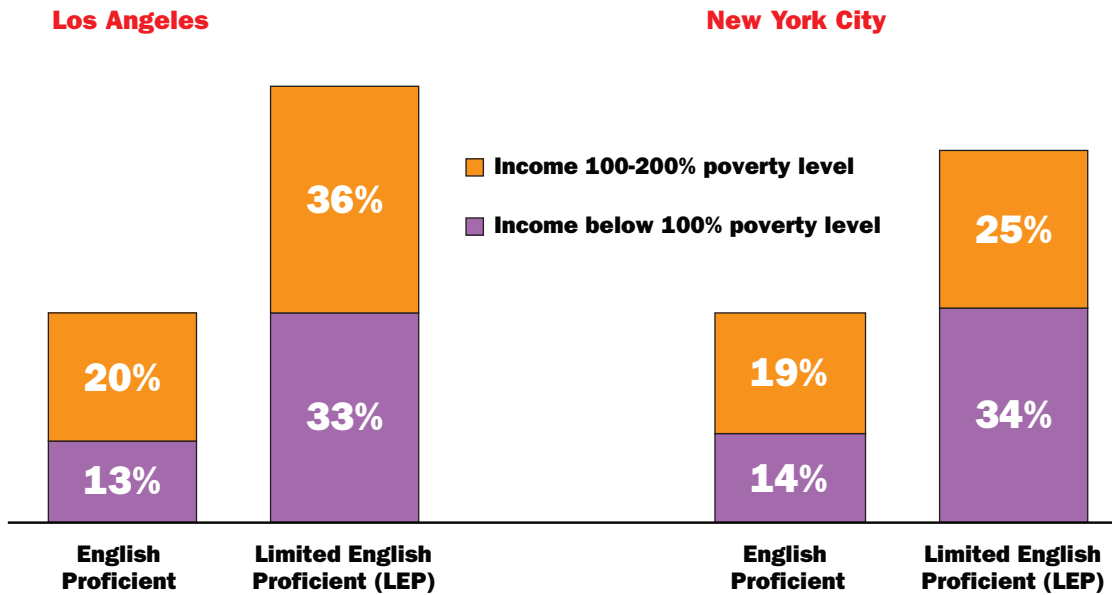


When we look at U.S. workers—in this chart full-time workers (35 hours or more per week for 50 weeks during the year before the survey) who are ages 25 and over—we see very high shares of immigrants have limited English skills.

In the native-born workforce, only 1 percent are limited English proficient (LEP). In contrast, almost half of all immigrant workers are LEP. The share LEP falls with time spent in the United States: 60 percent of workers in the country less than 10 years are LEP, and this share falls to about one quarter for workers who have been in the country for 20 years or more.



Families with LEP Immigrants Poorer on Average



(1999-2000 Los Angeles New York City Immigrant Survey)

The importance of English skills in determining income and prosperity is shown clearly in this figure. Our research has shown that lack of English ability is the characteristic most closely associated with poverty in immigrant families. In fact, English ability shows a stronger association with poverty and income (as well as measures of economic hardship) than legal status or length of residency in the country.

These data are based on an Urban Institute survey of several thousand immigrant families in Los Angeles and New York City—the country’s two largest cities—during 1999-2000. The sample consisted entirely of families where at least one adult was born outside the United States.

Among immigrant families in these two cities, those with LEP adults had poverty rates more than twice as high as families where all adults were proficient in English. In Los Angeles, one third of all immigrant families with LEP adults had incomes below the official U.S. poverty rate (\$US 16,700 for a family of four in 1999; the poverty rate is adjusted by family size so it is higher for larger families and lower for smaller families). Seventy percent of LEP immigrant families in Los Angeles had incomes below twice the official poverty rate.