

Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States

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A flag hangs at the vice president's residence at the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, DC. (Photo: Petty Officer 2nd Class Sean Hur/DOD)

The United States is in the midst of an historic period in its immigration history, facing a changing composition of the immigrant population, pandemic-related pent-up demand for permanent and temporary visas resulting in extensive backlogs, record pressure at the U.S.-Mexico border, and somewhat decreasing public support for expanded immigration.

Legal permanent and temporary immigration rose in 2022 after a few years of chill brought about by the COVID-19 public-health crisis and the Trump administration's restrictive policies and rhetoric. Amid crises around the world, the Biden administration extended or expanded Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for certain eligible immigrants already in the United States and announced special humanitarian parole programs allowing some migrants from several countries to enter the United States and stay temporarily.

At the southwest border, record numbers of migrant encounters in 2022 accompanied court orders preventing the Biden administration from revoking the Title 42 public-health order authorizing the rapid expulsion of asylum seekers and other migrants. The administration has proposed a revised system to govern asylum at the border, but as of this writing the situation remains in flux. To promote orderly arrival and processing of asylum seekers and expedite the expulsion of unauthorized migrants, in January 2023 the Biden administration announced another humanitarian parole program to include up to 30,000 authorized newcomers from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela every month if they have a U.S. sponsor. This program was followed by controversial proposed changes to U.S. asylum system.

Worldwide, the United States is home to more international migrants than any other country, and more than the next four countries—Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United Kingdom—combined, according to the UN Population Division's mid-2020 data. While the U.S. population represents about 5 percent of the total world population, close to 20 percent of all global migrants reside in the United States.

This Spotlight offers information about the approximately 45.3 million immigrants in the United States as of 2021, by compiling the most authoritative and current data available. It provides an overview of historic immigration trends in the United States, sociodemographic information about who is immigrating, through which channels, and how many immigrants become naturalized citizens. It also provides data on the government's enforcement actions and adjudication efforts to process visas.

This article draws on statistics from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI); the U.S. Census Bureau (using its 2021 American Community Survey [ACS], 2022 Current Population Survey [CPS], and 2000 decennial census); and the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State. (Note: DHS and State Department data refer to fiscal years that begin on October 1 and end on September 30; ACS and CPS data refer to calendar years). For more detailed information on U.S. and global immigration data sources and one-click access to these datasets, see the MPI report [Immigration Data Matters](#). All the data tools and maps linked to in this article also can be accessed through MPI's [Migration Data Hub](#).

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Definitions

"**Foreign born**" and "**immigrant**" are used interchangeably and refer to persons with no U.S. citizenship at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, persons on certain temporary visas, and unauthorized immigrants.

Geographical regions: MPI follows the definition of Latin America as put forth by the United Nations and the U.S. Census Bureau, which spans Central America (including Mexico), the Caribbean, and South America. For more information about geographical regions, see the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and [United Nations Statistics Division](#).

Immigrants Now and Historically

How many immigrants reside in the United States?

Nearly 45.3 million immigrants lived in the United States in 2021, the most since census records have been kept. In 2021, immigrants comprised 13.6 percent of the total U.S. population, a figure that remains short of the record high of 14.8 percent in 1890 and slightly below the 13.7 percent share they comprised in 2019.

The foreign-born population remained largely flat between 2019 and 2021, with an increase of 337,000 people, or growth of less than 1 percent. While the immigrant population has generally been growing, the increase over the last two years was smaller than the change from 2017 to 2019 (407,000) and much smaller than between 2014 and 2016 (1.3 million). The slowing growth of the immigrant population over the past few years is mirrored by the slowing growth of the overall U.S. population since 2015.

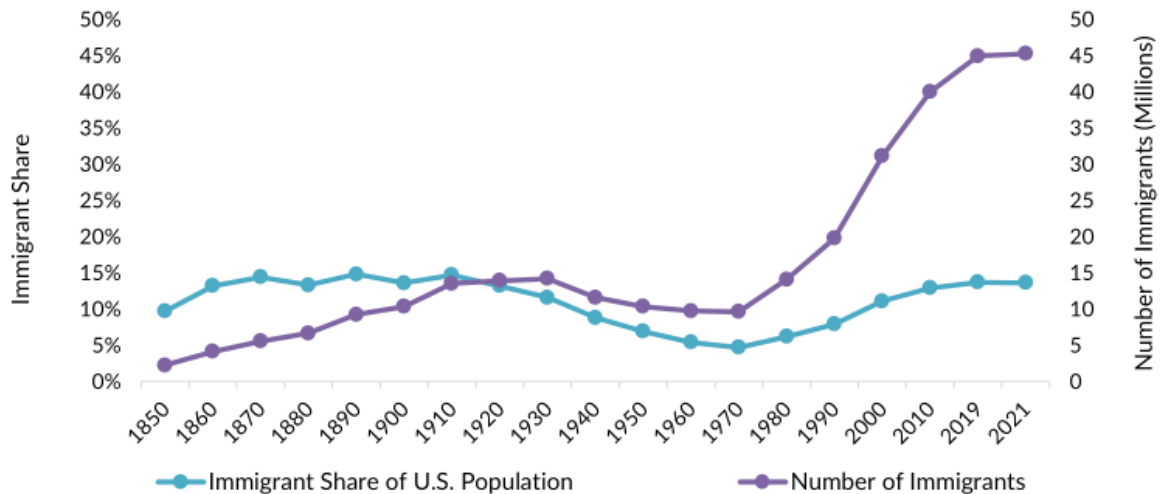
Note: 2020 was an unusual year in many ways, including in immigration flows and in data collection efforts. Many fewer people were able to move across international borders because of pandemic-related border restrictions and policies of sending and receiving countries alike. At the same time, the U.S. Census Bureau experienced significant challenges collecting data in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and released only a few data points from its 2020 ACS. Because of these data challenges, it is difficult to assess the real extent of the changes in the last couple of years.

How have the number and share of immigrants changed over time?

In 1850, the first year the United States began collecting nativity data through the census, the country had 2.2 million immigrants, representing nearly 10 percent of the total population.

Between 1860 and 1920, immigrants' share of the population fluctuated between 13 percent and 15 percent, peaking at 14.8 percent in 1890 amid high levels of immigration from Europe. Restrictive immigration laws in 1921 and 1924 limited permanent immigration almost exclusively to those from Northern and Western Europe. Combined with the Great Depression and onset of World War II, this led to a sharp drop in new arrivals from the Eastern Hemisphere. The foreign-born share steadily declined, hitting a record low of 4.7 percent (or 9.6 million immigrants) in 1970 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Size and Share of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1850-2021



Sources: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-21 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970, 1990, and 2000 decennial census. All other data are from Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (Working Paper no. 29, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999).

Since 1970, the share and number of immigrants had increased rapidly, mainly because of increased immigration from Latin America and Asia following important shifts in U.S. immigration law such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished national-origin admission quotas, the creation of a formal refugee resettlement program with the Refugee Act of 1980, and the Cold War-era grant of preferential treatment to Cuban immigrants. Other factors were the United States' growing economic and military presence in Asia and Latin America, as well as economic and social ties with the United States' southern neighbors, and major economic transformations and political instability in countries around the world. It remains unclear whether the recent leveling off represents a change in the long-term trend or a temporary blip.

- Want more data about historical immigration to the United States? Check out the [U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-Present data tool](#).
- Get a comprehensive understanding of U.S. immigration trends and policies over the nation's history in the article "[Immigration Has Been a Defining, Often Contentious, Element Throughout U.S. History.](#)"
- Understand the impact of the 1965 law in "[Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States.](#)"
- Read more about the end of national-origin quotas in "[The Geopolitical Origins of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965.](#)"

Where are most immigrants from originally?

Mexicans are the largest group of U.S. immigrants, comprising 24 percent of the total immigrant population in 2021, which is a decline from 30 percent in 2000. India and China (including Hong Kong and Macao but not Taiwan) were the next two largest sending countries, accounting for approximately 6 and 5 percent, respectively, of the overall foreign-born population. Other top countries of origin include the Philippines (4

percent); El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic (each 3 percent); and Guatemala and Korea (each 2 percent).

Together, these ten countries accounted for 56 percent of all immigrants in the United States in 2021.

- To learn more about key immigrant populations, check out the *Migration Information Source's* [Spotlights archive](#). These articles provide a wealth of data about various immigrant groups in the United States including [Mexicans](#), [Chinese](#), [Indians](#), and [Filipinos](#), as well as more recent groups such as [Afghans](#), [Ukrainians](#), and more.

How do today's top countries of origin compare to those of the past?

The large numbers of immigrants from Latin America and Asia in recent decades represent a sharp turnaround from the mid-1900s, when immigration largely came from Europe. In the 1960s, no single country accounted for more than 15 percent of the U.S. immigrant population, but Italians were the top origin group, making up 13 percent of the foreign born in 1960, followed by Germans and Canadians (about 10 percent each).

Immigrants from Mexico have been the most numerous since 1980, but the composition of new arrivals has changed since 2010. Now, immigrants are more likely to come from Asia, especially India and China. In fact, these two nations displaced Mexico as the top origin countries for new arrivals from 2013 to 2021, but amid the pandemic and related mobility restrictions Mexico has regained its position as the origin of most new arrivals.

In terms of the total size, the immigrant population from India increased by 929,000 and from China/Hong Kong by 572,000 between 2010 and 2021. In contrast, the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States declined by more than 1 million during the same period, representing the largest absolute decline of all immigrant groups.

The number of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, Nigeria, Colombia, the Philippines, and El Salvador has increased by at least 200,000 each since 2010. Among the groups numbering at least 100,000 in 2021, the Venezuelan immigrant population increased by the fastest rate between 2010 and 2021 (by 196 percent), followed by immigrants from Nepal (151 percent), Afghanistan (127 percent), Myanmar (also known as Burma, 111 percent), and Nigeria (102 percent). In comparison, the total foreign-born population grew by 13 percent between 2010 and 2021.

- See how immigrants' regions of origin have changed over time with the [Regions of Birth for Immigrants in the United States, 1960-Present](#) data tool.
- Want to see historical immigration trends from individual countries? Use the [Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960-Present](#) data tool.
- Compare the top ten origin countries in different decades with the interactive [Largest U.S. Immigrant Groups over Time, 1960-Present](#) data tool.
- Read more about "[Immigrants from New Origin Countries in the United States.](#)"

How long have current immigrants resided in the United States?

Forty-eight percent of all immigrants in the United States in 2021 arrived prior to 2000 (28 percent entered before 1990 and 20 percent between 1990 and 1999), 24 percent entered between 2000 and 2009, and 28 percent have come since 2010.

How many U.S. residents are from immigrant families?

Immigrants and their U.S.-born children number approximately 87.7 million people, or close to 27 percent of the U.S. population in the 2022 CPS, an increase of approximately 14.7 million (or 20 percent) from 2010.

Demographic, Educational, and Linguistic Characteristics

Definitions

College-educated persons are defined as adults 25 years and older with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Race as used by the U.S. Census Bureau reflects the race or races with which individuals most closely self-identify. Race categories include both racial and national-origin groups.

Hispanic and Latino are ethnic, not racial, categories. They include individuals who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the decennial census and American Community Survey questionnaire—"Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban"—as well as those who indicate that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin." Persons who indicated that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" include those whose origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, the Dominican Republic, or people who self-identify more generally as Spanish, Spanish-American, Hispanic, Hispano, Latino, and so on.

Read more about the U.S. Census Bureau's definitions on [its website](#).

What is the median age for immigrants?

The immigrant population's median age in 2021 was 47 years, making it older than the U.S.-born population, which had a median age of 37 years. One reason for this difference is that immigrants arrive largely as adults, whereas immigrants' children born in the United States contribute to the younger median age of the native-born population.

Fewer than 1 percent of immigrants were under age 5 in 2021, compared to 6 percent of the U.S.-born population. Children and youth ages 5 to 17 accounted for 5 percent of immigrants and 18 percent of the U.S. born. People of working age (18 to 64 years) comprised 77 percent of the immigrant population, a much higher figure than the 59 percent of those born in the United States. Approximately 17 percent of both immigrants and the U.S. born were 65 years and older.

What is the sex ratio of the immigrant population?

About 51 percent of all U.S. immigrants were female in 2021, compared to 50 percent of the native born. The share has fluctuated slightly over the past four decades, but immigrant women and girls tend to be a slight majority over men and boys. They accounted for 53 percent of the immigrant population in 1980, 51 percent in 1990, 50 percent in 2000, and 51 percent in 2010.

What is the racial makeup of immigrants?

In 2021, 27 percent as Asian of immigrants reported their race as single-race Asian, 21 percent as White, 9 percent as Black, and 20 percent as some other race. About 22 percent reported having two or more races.

Note: These statistics reflect changes in how the Census Bureau asks about race that have been made since the 2020 decennial census.

- Use the [State Immigration Data Profiles](#) from MPI's Migration Data Hub to learn more about the demographic characteristics of immigrants and the U.S. born (including age, race, and ethnicity) in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and nationwide.

How many immigrants are Hispanic or Latino?

In 2021, 44 percent of U.S. immigrants (19.9 million people) reported having Hispanic or Latino ethnic origins.

Note: The Census Bureau classifies Hispanic and Latino as ethnic categories, separate from the racial categories listed above (see Definitions box for more information).

How many Hispanics in the United States are immigrants?

Most U.S. Hispanics are U.S. born. Of the 62.5 million people in 2021 who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, 32 percent (19.9 million) were immigrants and 68 percent (42.6 million) were native born.

Which languages are most frequently spoken at home?

Regardless of nativity, in 2021 approximately 78 percent (245.5 million) of all 313.2 million U.S. residents ages 5 and older reported speaking only English at home. The remaining 22 percent (67.8 million) reported speaking a language other than English at home.

Among those who reported speaking a language other than English at home, 61 percent spoke Spanish. Other top languages were Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese, 5 percent); Tagalog (almost 3 percent); and Vietnamese, Arabic, French (including Cajun), and Korean (about 2 percent each) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Top Languages Spoken at Home Other than English (ages 5 and older), 2021

	Number	Share of All Speakers of Foreign Languages
TOTAL	67,754,000	100.0%
Spanish	41,255,000	60.9%
Chinese (incl. Mandarin and Cantonese)	3,405,000	5.0%
Tagalog (incl. Filipino)	1,715,000	2.5%
Vietnamese	1,523,000	2.2%
Arabic	1,391,000	2.1%
French (incl. Cajun)	1,175,000	1.7%
Korean	1,073,000	1.6%
Russian	1,045,000	1.5%
Portuguese	937,000	1.4%
Haitian	895,000	1.3%
Hindi	865,000	1.3%
German	857,000	1.3%
Yoruba, Twi, Igbo, other languages of Western Africa	640,000	0.9%
Amharic, Somali, other Afro-Asiatic languages	596,000	0.9%
Yiddish, Pennsylvania Dutch, other West Germanic languages	574,000	0.8%
Polish	533,000	0.8%
Italian	513,000	0.8%
Urdu	508,000	0.7%

Note: Table shows languages with at least 500,000 speakers.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS.

Not including English, Spanish was the most common language spoken at home in all but three states: Hawaii (Ilocano) and Maine and Vermont (French). Not including English or Spanish, Chinese, German, French and Vietnamese were among the commonly spoken languages (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Map of Most Commonly Spoken Languages other than English and Spanish by State, 2021



Notes: Chinese includes Mandarin and Cantonese; Dakota+ includes Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, and Sioux; French includes Cajun; German includes Pennsylvania Dutch and Swiss; and Tagalog includes Filipino.

Sources: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS for the United States.

How many immigrants are Limited English Proficient (LEP)?

In 2021, approximately 46 percent (20.8 million) of the 45 million immigrants ages 5 and older were Limited English Proficient (LEP). Immigrants accounted for 80 percent of the country’s 25.9 million LEP individuals.

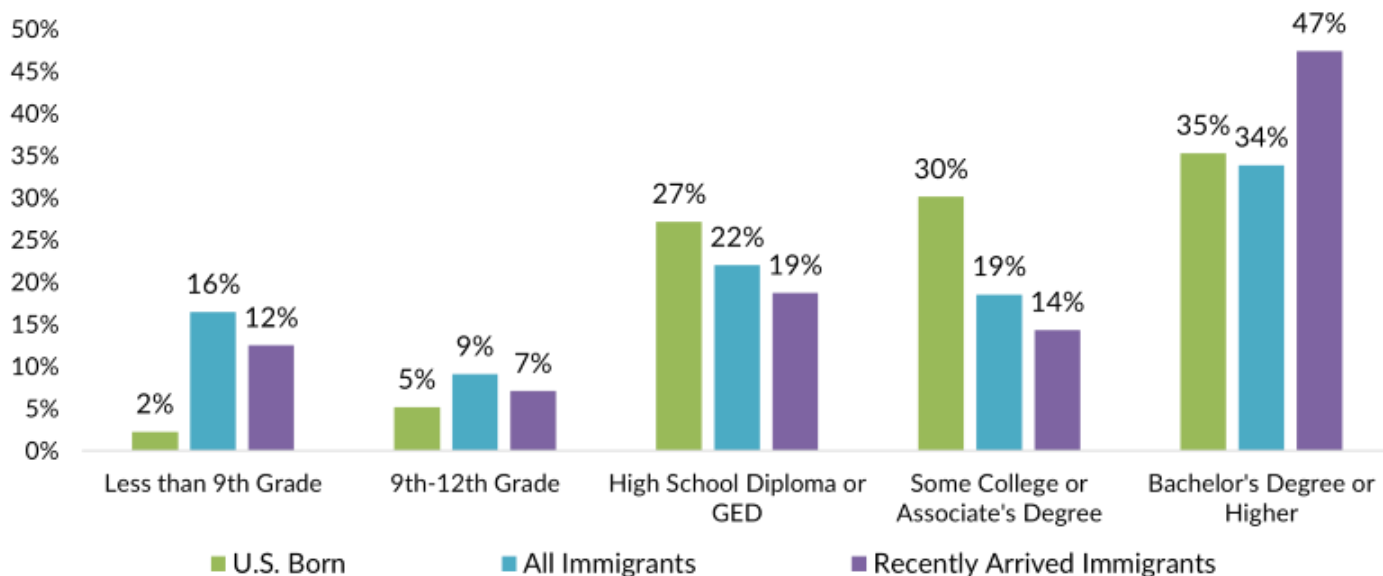
Note: The term "Limited English Proficient" refers to persons ages 5 and older who indicated on the ACS questionnaire that they spoke English less than "very well."

- Information on the size of the LEP population across the United States and in each state is available in MPI data table [Limited English Proficient Population: Number and Share, by State, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2019, and 2021](#).

What share of the immigrant population has a college education?

In 2021, 34 percent (13.6 million) of the 40.2 million immigrants ages 25 and older had a bachelor’s degree or higher, a rate similar to that of U.S.-born adults (see Figure 3). However, newer arrivals tend to be better educated; 47 percent of immigrants who entered the country between 2017 and 2021 held at least a bachelor’s degree.

Figure 3. Educational Attainment of U.S.-Born, Immigrant, and Recently Arrived Immigrant Adults, 2021



Note: Data are for adults ages 25 and older. Recently arrived immigrants are those who entered the United States between 2017 and 2021.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS.

Educational attainment levels vary by immigrants’ countries of origin. Approximately 80 percent of immigrant adults from India had a bachelor’s degree or more in 2021, more than any other origin country. Other top countries were the United Arab Emirates (78 percent), Saudi Arabia (77 percent), Taiwan (73 percent), Bulgaria, France, and Singapore (67 percent each). Among immigrants who arrived between 2017 and 2021, the share who were college graduates was the highest among Indians (86 percent), followed by those from France, Taiwan, and Spain (between 81 percent and 82 percent). The college-educated share is also high among Venezuelans, who represent the fastest growing U.S. immigrant group. Fifty-seven percent of all Venezuelan immigrant adults and 62 percent of recent arrivals have at least a bachelor’s degree.

- Find information for all origin countries in the MPI dataset [Educational Attainment Among U.S.-Born Adults and All Immigrant Adults by Country of Birth in 2021](#).
- Read more about the socioeconomic characteristics of highly educated immigrants in the article [“College-Educated Immigrants in the United States.”](#)

Immigrant Destinations

Which U.S. states have the largest numbers of immigrants?

The U.S. states with the most immigrants in 2021 were California (10.5 million), Texas (5.1 million), Florida (4.6 million), New York (4.4 million), and New Jersey (2.1 million).

As a percentage of the total population, immigrants made up the largest shares in California (27 percent), New Jersey (23 percent), New York (22 percent), Florida (21 percent), Hawaii (19 percent), and Nevada (18 percent).

- For more information on the top states of residence for the foreign born over time, see the interactive tool [Immigrant Population by State, 1990-Present](#).
- Want to know where immigrants from a particular region or country of origin settled in the United States? The Migration Data Hub’s interactive maps show top immigrant concentrations at [state and county](#) or [metropolitan-area](#) levels.

Which states have experienced the fastest growth of their immigrant populations?

Traditional immigrant destinations have the largest absolute number of new immigrants, but other states have seen much larger relative growth in their immigrant populations. In some cases, this is because the states’ initial foreign-born populations were quite small, so a relatively small absolute increase has translated into high-percent growth (see Table 2). For instance, more immigrants moved to Florida between 2010 and 2021 than any other state (951,000), but the size of the immigrant population in North Dakota grew by the largest relative share (103 percent).

Table 2. Top States by Absolute and Percent Growth in Immigrant Population, 2010-21

Rank	Absolute Growth		Percent Change	
	1	Florida	951,000	North Dakota
2	Texas	950,000	Delaware	41%
3	California	301,000	South Dakota	39%
4	New Jersey	290,000	Idaho	32%
5	Washington	257,000	Kentucky	29%
6	Massachusetts	244,000	Washington	29%

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2021 American Community Surveys (ACS).