

The New Geography of United States Immigration

New trends in immigration are changing communities across the United States. The movement of immigrants from abroad to the heart of America's largest cities is no longer the dominant pattern as it was in the past. The restructuring of the U.S. economy and the accompanying decentralization of cities and growth of suburbs as major employment centers have shifted immigrant settlement to a new class of metropolitan areas. Emerging destinations tend to be metropolitan areas with more recent development histories, largely suburban in form. Many of the newest destination areas have little history or identity with immigration.



This brief highlights the recent trends in immigration, including the new geography of immigration and changes in the demographic characteristics of immigrants.

In some new destination areas, the pace of immigration has aroused social conflict and anxiety over immigrants' legal status and the costs of providing services such as healthcare and education to the children of immigrants. Local pressures have motivated many public officials to act—passing state and local laws and instituting new policies aimed at immigrants. These responses have ranged from those that serve to accommodate and integrate immigrants to those that seem designed to explicitly intimidate and exclude immigrants.

These current trends and new settlement patterns result in many more states and municipalities with a stake in the passage of federal immigration reform.

Background

Consistent with the current economic recession and its concomitant decline in economic opportunity, immigration shows signs of recent slowing after the great wave of 1990s immigration. Today, the Census Bureau estimates more than 38

million foreign-born persons reside in the United States, making up nearly 13 percent of the U.S. population. According to estimates from the Pew Hispanic Center, 36 percent of the foreign-born population are naturalized U.S. citizens, 31 percent are legal permanent residents, 30 percent are unauthorized; the remainder are legal temporary immigrants.

Immigration sharply declined in the mid 20th century; but grew rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, as Figure 1 shows. This decade so far sees a slowing of net immigration relative to the 1990s, but already there are more new immigrants than in the 1980s.

Figure 1. After mid-century losses, immigration has increased rapidly.

Change in the Foreign-Born Population by Decade (in thousands)
1860-2007 (year shown is end of decade)

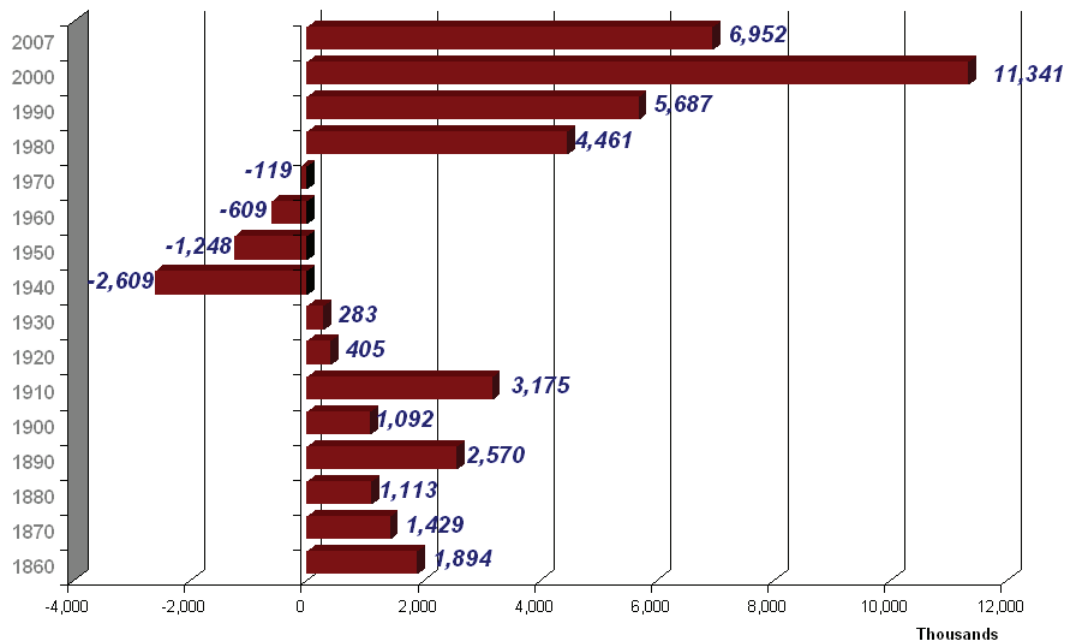
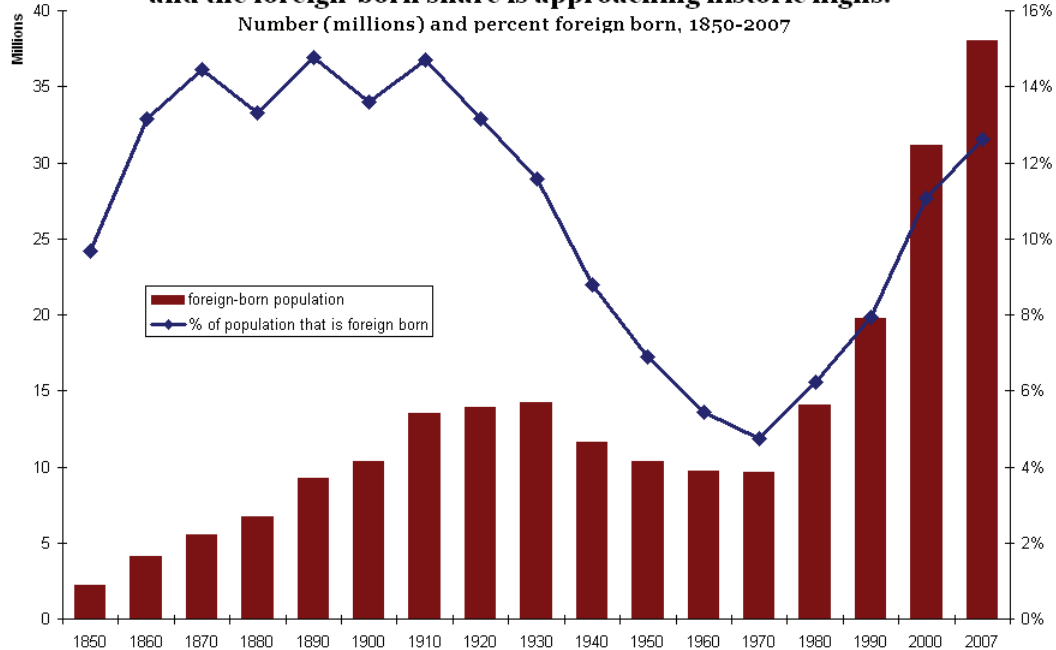


Figure 2 illustrates that the foreign-born share is approaching the historic highs witnessed around the turn of the 20th century. The steady growth of the immigrant population during the late 1800s and into the 1900s was punctuated by the Great Depression and two world wars that slowed migration. The mid-20th century baby boom boosted the native-born population at a time when immigration to the United States had reached a low point. However, the current trend beginning in the 1980s is a steady

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upward growth of the foreign-born proportion of the U.S. population.

Figure 2. More immigrants reside in the US than ever before, and the foreign-born share is approaching historic highs.



Data source: US Census Bureau

As the immigrant population has grown, origin countries have changed. No longer do the majority of immigrants come from Europe (they were 62 percent of the immigrant population in 1970). The profile of today’s immigrants is quite different, with only 13 percent with roots in Europe, and 30 percent from Mexico, 23 percent from the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, 27 percent from Asia; with the remaining 7 percent from Africa, Canada, Australia and all other countries.

Demographic Characteristics

The foreign-born differ in important ways from the U.S.-born population.

Most immigrants here today are of working ages (81 percent) compared with only 60 percent of the U.S.-born population between 18 and 64. The age structure difference is primarily tied to the child population. The majority of children of U.S. immigrants are born in the United States and accorded U.S. citizenship at

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birth. Thus, while children comprise 27 percent of the native-born population, less than 8 percent of the foreign-born population is under age 18. Both populations have similar shares of seniors over 65 years of age.

Immigrants are also more likely to live in family households than the native born (77 percent vs. 65 percent) and a higher percentage of those households (44 percent) include children under the age of 18 compared with native-born households (29 percent). The immigrant population as a whole also has fewer nonfamily households than the native-born population, 24 percent as compared with 35 percent.

Overall, 23 percent of that nation's children under 18 are the children of immigrants, or the "second generation." This statistic includes all children with at least one foreign-born parent; they may be either U.S. – or foreign-born.

Nationally, 52 percent of the foreign-born population reports speaking English "less than very well"—a standard measure of proficiency. Among all groups, immigrants from Mexico and Central America have the highest shares of limited proficiency in English.

These national-level statistics mask many important differences among country of origin groups, reflecting their different pathways to the United States, including refugee resettlement, both high- and low-skilled labor flows and family unification.

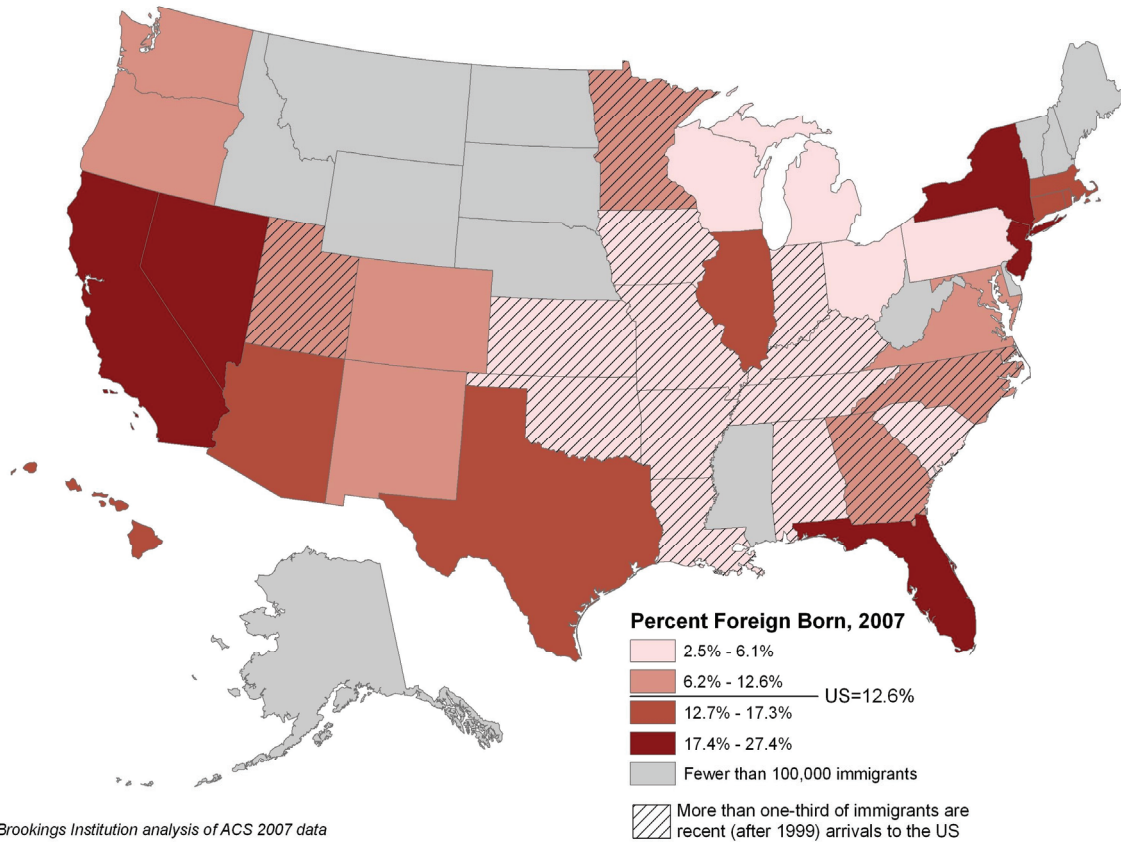
Changes in Settlement Trends

Nationwide, nearly 28 percent of all immigrants residing in the United States in 2007 arrived after 1999. After several decades of very high growth rates, particularly during the economically robust 1990s, new opportunities beckoned immigrants to many cities, suburbs, and rural areas outside of established immigrant destinations.

As Map 1 shows, states with long established immigrant populations, such as California, New York, New Jersey, Nevada, Florida and Texas have higher shares of foreign-born populations. In new destination states, such as Tennessee, North Carolina, Utah, Minnesota, and Georgia, more than one-third of the foreign-born population arrived only since 1999.

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Map 1. Many states with high proportions of recent arrivals have little experience with immigration.



Brookings Institution analysis of ACS 2007 data

As a result, many more communities across the United States are confronting immigration and the social, economic and civic integration of immigrant newcomers with little prior experience.

The majority of immigrants live in the nation's metropolitan areas (95 percent). Table 1 (panel 1) shows the 10 largest metros ranked by size of the foreign-born population and their share of the population. In some respects, America's immigrant population can be viewed as geographically concentrated. More than half of all immigrants live in the top 10 metropolitan destinations: New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Washington, DC, Riverside-San Bernardino, and Phoenix.

Table 1. The Metro Areas with the most immigrants differ from those with the highest immigrant population shares and highest growth rates, 2007

Ranked by Size of Foreign-Born Population

	Metro area*	Total Population	Foreign-born population
1	New York, NY-NJ-PA	18,815,988	5,328,891
2	Los Angeles, CA	12,875,587	4,488,563
3	Miami, FL	5,413,212	2,005,178
4	Chicago, IL	9,522,879	1,679,074
5	San Francisco, CA	4,203,898	1,245,007
6	Houston, TX	5,629,127	1,204,817
7	Dallas, TX	6,144,489	1,092,361
8	Washington, DC-VA-MD-WV	5,306,125	1,088,949
9	Riverside, CA	4,081,371	911,982
10	Phoenix, AZ	4,179,427	736,068

Ranked by Foreign-Born Share of Population

	Metro area*	Total Population	Foreign-born population	Share
1	San Jose, CA	1,803,549	671,106	37.2%
2	Miami, FL	5,413,212	2,005,178	37.0%
3	Los Angeles, CA	12,875,587	4,488,563	34.9%
4	San Francisco, CA	4,203,898	1,245,007	29.6%
5	McAllen, TX	710,514	202,345	28.5%
6	New York, NY-NJ-PA	18,815,988	5,328,891	28.3%
7	El Paso, TX	734,669	196,171	26.7%
8	Stockton, CA	670,990	163,163	24.3%
9	Oxnard, CA	798,364	185,207	23.2%
10	San Diego, CA	2,974,859	674,084	22.7%

Ranked by Growth in the Foreign-Born, 2000-2007

	Metro area*	Foreign-born population, 2000	Foreign-born population, 2007	Change
1	Greenville, SC	22,675	40,145	77.0%
2	Lakeland, FL	33,519	58,625	74.9%
3	Nashville, TN	58,539	101,932	74.1%
4	Little Rock AR	14,285	24,863	74.0%
5	Knoxville, TN	13,345	22,897	71.6%
6	Indianapolis, IN	53,296	90,994	70.7%
7	Las Vegas, NV	247,751	408,796	65.0%
8	Birmingham AL	22,224	36,631	64.8%
9	Orlando, FL	197,119	323,101	63.9%
10	Columbia, SC	21,195	34,739	63.9%

**Metro area names are shortened.*

Source: Brookings analysis of 2007 American Community Survey data

Many are well-established immigration gateways, but several have emerged as major destination areas only in the past two decades, such as Washington and Dallas-Ft. Worth—both with more than 1 million foreign-born residents.

Many of these same metro areas also rank in the top ten among those with the greatest proportion of foreign-born residents, including Miami, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, where at least one third of the population are foreign born (shown in panel 2 of Table 1). Other metro areas on this list include metropolitan New York and several metro areas in the established settlement states of California and Texas.

Many of the metropolitan areas with the fastest and most recent gains in the foreign born are clustered in the Southeast, a relatively new immigrant destination (Table 1, panel 3). Some of these new destination metros—such as Knoxville, Tenn. and Greenville, S.C.—have high growth rates partly because they started out the decade with small foreign-born populations. However, other new destination areas have attracted immigrants in great numbers recently, such as Las Vegas and Orlando, each with more than 200,000. Still, immigrant populations in well-established gateway metropolitan areas like New York and Miami are gaining in large numbers in absolute terms, but growing more slowly as a function of their absolute size.

In another important geographical shift: as of 2007, a majority of the foreign-born resides in the suburbs of large metropolitan areas. In 1980, that share was just 44 percent. This shift away from the core is reflected in the percentage of immigrants living in the primary cities of the top 100 metropolitan areas: In 1980, it was 41 percent; by 2007, it had decreased to 34 percent. Smaller metropolitan areas and non-metropolitan areas, while maintaining their respective shares of about 10 percent and 5 percent of the nation's immigrant population, have seen high growth rates. In addition, some individual counties experienced exceptionally fast growth between 2000 and 2007. Those include Georgia's Gwinnett County in suburban Atlanta and Virginia's Loudoun County in suburban Washington.

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The United States in Global Perspective

The United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world, or an estimated 20 percent of persons living outside their country of birth. The estimated 38 million foreign-born persons residing in the United States make up nearly 13 percent of the U.S. population.

Worldwide, less than 3 percent of the population lives outside of their country of birth (an estimated 200 million people). However, migrants are not evenly distributed

across countries, 60 percent live in more developed countries and the remaining 40 percent in developing countries. The top 10 host countries are where more than half of the world's immigrants live: the United States, Russia, Germany, France, Saudi Arabia, Canada, India, the United Kingdom, Spain and Australia.

Of the 19 metropolitan areas in the world with more than 1 million foreign-born, 8 are in the United States, including New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, Houston, Dallas-Ft Worth, and Washington, DC.

Forty-two percent of U.S. population growth currently comes from immigration. The rest comes from natural increase, or births minus deaths. Many European countries and Japan are more reliant on immigration for their population growth, and will continue to see population decline as natural increase declines.

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