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POLICY BRIEF

The Growth and Reach of Immigration: New Census Bureau Data Underscore Importance of Immigrants in the U.S. Labor Force

By Rob Paral*

Introduction

New data from the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS),¹ released by the Census Bureau on August 15, 2006, underscore the extent to which immigration continues to fuel the expansion of the U.S. labor force. The foreign-born population of the United States increased by 4.9 million between 2000 and 2005; raising the total foreign-born population to 35.7 million, or 12.4 percent of the 288.4 million people in the country. The foreign-born population includes legal immigrants who come here on permanent and temporary visas for work, study, and family reunification, as well as an estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants who come for the same reasons but are generally precluded from obtaining visas by shortcomings in the U.S. immigration system.

Since most legal and undocumented immigrants alike come to the United States to work, it is no surprise that they are moving to all regions of the country. While the majority of immigrants still settle in traditional “gateway” states such as California, Florida, New York, and Texas, growing numbers also are settling in “non-traditional” destinations like South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. Moreover, immigration is stabilizing the populations of many Northeastern states such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Yet the continued growth of the immigrant population and its dispersion to new locales does not imply that native-born workers are being displaced or otherwise disadvantaged by the influx of foreign-born workers. Quite the opposite, in fact. Immigrants are going where there are job openings and economic opportunities. As a recent study by the Pew Hispanic Center concludes: “Between 2000 and 2004, there was a positive correlation between the increase in the foreign born population and the employment of native-born workers in 27 states and the District of Columbia,” which “accounted for 67% of all native-born workers and include all the major destination states for immigrants.”²

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¹ The 2005 American Community Survey included 3 percent of all households in the United States, which represents a substantial advance in the quality of intercensal population estimates. The ACS excludes the small percentage of persons who live in group quarters including prisons and nursing homes. To make the numbers in this report comparable with the 2000 census (which covered the entire population), all 2000 data are for the population in households, excluding residents of group quarters.

² Rakesh Kochhar, *Growth in the Foreign-Born Workforce and Employment of the Native Born*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, August 10, 2006, p. ii.

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The primary reason that immigrants don't have a negative impact on the majority of native-born workers is that they aren't competing for the same jobs. The U.S. population is growing older and better educated, while the U.S. economy continues to create a large number of jobs that favor younger workers with little formal education. As a result, immigrants increasingly are filling jobs at the less-skilled end of the occupational spectrum for which relatively few native-born workers are available. According to the new ACS data, between 2000 and 2005, the median age of the U.S. population increased from 35.3 to 36.4 years old. During the same period, the share of adults with at least a high-school diploma increased from 80 to 84 percent, while the share with at least a bachelor's degree rose from 24 to 27 percent. Not surprisingly, few of these better educated (and older) native-born workers are willing or able to fill the frequently strenuous less-skilled jobs that don't even require a high-school education. But immigrants are. That immigrants come here to fill available jobs is evident in the fact that, as of 2005, 94 percent of adult male undocumented immigrants and 86 percent of adult male legal immigrants were in the labor force.³ As Congress debates competing proposals for comprehensive immigration reform, it would do well to pay close attention to these trends. Immigrants are already an integral part of U.S. society and an indispensable part of the U.S. labor force.

National Findings

According to the 2005 ACS data, the foreign-born population in 2005 numbered 35.7 million. While the U.S. population as a whole increased by 5.4 percent in the 2000-2005 period, the number of immigrants grew three times faster, at a rate of 16 percent.

Population Change 2000-2005				
	2000	2005	Net Number Change	Pct. Change
Total Population	273,637,396	288,378,137	14,740,741	5.4%
Foreign Born	30,760,065	35,689,842	4,929,777	16.0%

About one in eight persons in the United States was born outside the country as of 2005. This represents an increase of more than one percent in five years. Immigrants comprise an even greater share of adults in the United States: 15.1 percent, or one in six persons.

Percent Foreign Born		
	2000	2005
Total Population	11.2%	12.4%
Adults	13.6%	15.1%

Immigrants from Latin America constituted a majority (57.3 percent) of the 7.9 million new immigrants who arrived in the United States between 2000 and 2005. One quarter of recent arrivals came from Asia and about 9.6 percent from Europe. However, over this same time period, about 3 million foreign-born individuals in the United States either died or returned to their home countries, meaning that the foreign-born population as a whole increased by a lesser margin of 4.9 million.

³ Jeffrey S. Passel, *The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S.: Estimates Based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, March 7, 2005, p. 9.

New Immigrant Arrivals: 2000-2005

	#	Pct. of Total
Total	7,939,822	100.0%
Europe	764,527	9.6%
Asia	2,001,195	25.2%
Mexico	2,796,118	35.2%
Other Latin America	1,751,998	22.1%
Other areas	625,984	7.9%

State-by-State Trends

Six states have immigrant populations of more than one million: California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. These states have long been the major ports of entry for immigrants to the United States and this continues to be the case today. In 2005, two-thirds of immigrants in the United States resided in these traditional immigration gateways. However, immigrant populations of more than 500,000 are now found in new destinations such as North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and Georgia.

California still is the state with the highest proportion of immigrants in its population. More than 27 percent of California residents were foreign-born in 2005. Immigrants account for more than one in six persons (15 percent or more) in seven states: California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, Nevada, and Hawaii.

Although the largest immigrant populations are still concentrated in a relatively small number of states, immigration growth rates are highest in “non-traditional” destinations in the South and Midwest. For instance, the number of immigrants in South Carolina grew by 47.8 percent in just the 2000-2005 period. In Georgia (which has the ninth largest immigrant population in the United States), the foreign-born population increased by almost 39 percent in five years.

Foreign Born in 2005

	Foreign Born Population	Foreign Born Share of Total Population	Net Numeric Increase in Foreign Born	Growth Rate
United States	35,689,842	12.4%	4,929,777	16.0%
California	9,611,356	27.2%	801,715	9.1%
New York	3,997,268	21.4%	178,240	4.7%
Texas	3,542,513	15.9%	664,010	23.1%
Florida	3,212,955	18.5%	578,606	22.0%
Illinois	1,695,289	13.6%	176,789	11.6%
New Jersey	1,662,857	19.5%	203,850	14.0%
Massachusetts	891,184	14.4%	138,285	18.4%
Arizona	843,296	14.5%	188,550	28.8%
Georgia	795,419	9.0%	222,258	38.8%
Washington	750,258	12.2%	141,636	23.3%
Virginia	723,667	9.9%	162,335	28.9%
Maryland	641,373	11.7%	129,333	25.3%
Michigan	605,656	6.1%	94,690	18.5%
Pennsylvania	603,674	5.0%	108,657	22.0%

North Carolina	560,753	6.7%	135,507	31.9%
Colorado	460,294	10.1%	93,044	25.3%
Connecticut	423,254	12.5%	62,132	17.2%
Nevada	413,298	17.4%	98,134	31.1%
Ohio	387,216	3.5%	49,013	14.5%
Oregon	344,575	9.7%	58,815	20.6%
Minnesota	316,716	6.3%	64,998	25.8%
Indiana	242,281	4.0%	55,834	29.9%
Wisconsin	227,372	4.2%	40,641	21.8%
Tennessee	223,118	3.8%	66,630	42.6%
Hawaii	212,404	17.2%	3,129	1.5%
Missouri	193,735	3.4%	43,732	29.2%
Utah	192,916	7.9%	36,850	23.6%
South Carolina	170,750	4.2%	55,242	47.8%
New Mexico	168,640	8.9%	21,190	14.4%
Oklahoma	155,880	4.5%	29,558	23.4%
Kansas	153,535	5.8%	19,065	14.2%
Rhode Island	130,517	12.6%	13,864	11.9%
Louisiana	121,590	2.8%	5,226	4.5%
Alabama	120,773	2.7%	33,806	38.9%
Iowa	103,143	3.6%	15,928	18.3%
Arkansas	101,169	3.7%	29,235	40.6%
Kentucky	98,798	2.4%	24,057	32.2%
Nebraska	96,127	5.6%	24,539	34.3%
Idaho	76,377	5.5%	13,854	22.2%
New Hampshire	72,480	5.7%	22,473	44.9%
Dist. of Columbia	67,717	13.1%	-4,715	-6.5%
Delaware	62,867	7.7%	18,110	40.5%
Mississippi	43,336	1.5%	6,663	18.2%
Maine	38,727	3.0%	3,203	9.0%
Alaska	34,368	5.4%	-2,196	-6.0%
Vermont	21,843	3.6%	-24	-0.1%
West Virginia	19,302	1.1%	-659	-3.3%
South Dakota	17,269	2.3%	3,411	24.6%
Montana	16,734	1.8%	647	4.0%
North Dakota	11,968	2.0%	478	4.2%
Wyoming	11,235	2.3%	-591	-5.0%

Much of the immigration occurring in states with the highest immigration growth rates is recent. About 38 percent of immigrants in Alabama, for example, have entered the United States since 2000. Similar percentages are found in South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The presence of many newly arrived immigrants suggests a need for settlement policies such as English-language classes to facilitate the integration of immigrants into U.S. society and thereby maximize their contributions to the U.S. economy.

Percent of Immigrants Who Arrived Since 2000

	Foreign Born in 2005	Entered 2000 or later	% Entered 2000 or later
United States	35,689,842	7,939,822	22.2%

South Dakota	17,269	7,593	44.0%
South Carolina	170,750	69,820	40.9%
Alabama	120,773	46,028	38.1%
Tennessee	223,118	83,658	37.5%
Kentucky	98,798	34,925	35.3%
North Carolina	560,753	195,646	34.9%
Indiana	242,281	83,073	34.3%
Mississippi	43,336	14,488	33.4%
Delaware	62,867	20,138	32.0%
Georgia	795,419	253,520	31.9%
Arkansas	101,169	31,951	31.6%
Nebraska	96,127	29,958	31.2%
Missouri	193,735	59,910	30.9%
Kansas	153,535	45,495	29.6%
Maryland	641,373	182,884	28.5%
Oklahoma	155,880	44,272	28.4%
Arizona	843,296	239,142	28.4%
Utah	192,916	54,601	28.3%
Colorado	460,294	129,463	28.1%
Iowa	103,143	28,884	28.0%
Minnesota	316,716	88,683	28.0%
North Dakota	11,968	3,343	27.9%
Idaho	76,377	21,106	27.6%
Ohio	387,216	106,703	27.6%
Oregon	344,575	92,249	26.8%
Wisconsin	227,372	60,776	26.7%
Michigan	605,656	161,326	26.6%
New Mexico	168,640	44,486	26.4%
Washington	750,258	196,709	26.2%
New Hampshire	72,480	18,795	25.9%
Virginia	723,667	186,135	25.7%
Dist. of Columbia	67,717	17,183	25.4%
Pennsylvania	603,674	152,663	25.3%
Massachusetts	891,184	213,634	24.0%
Texas	3,542,513	841,877	23.8%
Florida	3,212,955	727,936	22.7%
Nevada	413,298	92,932	22.5%
Connecticut	423,254	94,366	22.3%
New Jersey	1,662,857	350,023	21.0%
Illinois	1,695,289	349,135	20.6%
Rhode Island	130,517	26,471	20.3%
Louisiana	121,590	23,601	19.4%
Montana	16,734	3,219	19.2%
Vermont	21,843	4,166	19.1%
West Virginia	19,302	3,646	18.9%
Hawaii	212,404	37,747	17.8%
New York	3,997,268	692,794	17.3%
California	9,611,356	1,658,255	17.3%
Maine	38,727	6,662	17.2%
Alaska	34,368	5,869	17.1%
Wyoming	11,235	1,883	16.8%

In many Northeastern and Midwestern states which have aging populations and are experiencing out-migration and low fertility rates among natives, immigration plays an especially critical role in maintaining population size. Massachusetts is the most striking example. New immigration since 2000 actually exceeded overall population growth, suggesting that the state would have experienced a net population decline in the absence of immigration. Immigration also is a major factor in population stability in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

Immigration as a Percent of Overall Population Change: 2000-2005

	Population Change 2000-2005	Net Foreign Born Population Change 2000-2005	Foreign Born Change as Percent of Population Change 2000- 2005
United States	14,740,741	4,929,777	33.4%
Massachusetts	51,108	138,285	270.6%
Pennsylvania	136,970	108,657	79.3%
New York	259,978	178,240	68.6%
New Jersey	299,588	203,850	68.0%
Connecticut	94,914	62,132	65.5%
Rhode Island	23,088	13,864	60.0%
Michigan	179,853	94,690	52.6%
Illinois	345,481	176,789	51.2%
Nebraska	48,098	24,539	51.0%
Ohio	101,426	49,013	48.3%
Maryland	295,788	129,333	43.7%
Iowa	43,581	15,928	36.5%
Washington	388,043	141,636	36.5%
California	2,213,567	801,715	36.2%
Virginia	483,832	162,335	33.6%
Texas	1,983,512	664,010	33.5%
Kansas	57,552	19,065	33.1%
Florida	1,784,671	578,606	32.4%
Oklahoma	96,046	29,558	30.8%
New Hampshire	73,297	22,473	30.7%
Alabama	110,545	33,806	30.6%
Minnesota	213,748	64,998	30.4%
Delaware	60,008	18,110	30.2%
Indiana	190,172	55,834	29.4%
Arkansas	103,083	29,235	28.4%
Oregon	212,802	58,815	27.6%
Georgia	868,924	222,258	25.6%
Colorado	364,579	93,044	25.5%
Tennessee	270,370	66,630	24.6%
Nevada	414,660	98,134	23.7%
South Carolina	235,454	55,242	23.5%
Arizona	805,909	188,550	23.4%
Wisconsin	174,593	40,641	23.3%
Dist. of Columbia	-20,949	-4,715	22.5%
Missouri	198,826	43,732	22.0%
North Carolina	617,314	135,507	22.0%

New Mexico	104,913	21,190	20.2%
Kentucky	132,765	24,057	18.1%
South Dakota	20,655	3,411	16.5%
Utah	237,028	36,850	15.5%
Idaho	133,174	13,854	10.4%
Louisiana	56,253	5,226	9.3%
Mississippi	75,573	6,663	8.8%
Maine	43,265	3,203	7.4%
Hawaii	62,055	3,129	5.0%
Montana	32,725	647	2.0%
Vermont	14,719	-24	-0.2%
Wyoming	15,483	-591	-3.8%
North Dakota	-9,061	478	-5.3%
Alaska	34,828	-2,196	-6.3%
West Virginia	5,935	-659	-11.1%

Naturalized immigrants make up an increasing share of the potential electorate in states with large immigrant populations. Nowhere is this more evident than in California, which not only has a large immigrant population, but also was the site of large-scale naturalization drives in the 1990s. Today, naturalized immigrants comprise one in five voting-age adults in California. Naturalized immigrants are more than 10 percent of adults in New York, New Jersey, Hawaii, and Florida.

**Naturalized Citizen Pct. of
Voting-Age Population**

United States	7.3%
California	19.4%
New York	15.9%
New Jersey	14.1%
Hawaii	13.4%
Florida	12.0%
Nevada	9.8%
Massachusetts	8.8%
Illinois	8.4%
Connecticut	8.3%
Rhode Island	8.1%
Texas	7.6%
Maryland	7.2%
Washington	6.9%
Arizona	6.7%
Dist. of Columbia	5.8%
Virginia	5.7%
Alaska	4.4%
Colorado	4.3%
Oregon	4.3%
Delaware	4.1%
New Mexico	4.0%
Georgia	3.9%
Michigan	3.7%
New Hampshire	3.5%
Utah	3.5%
Pennsylvania	3.1%
Minnesota	3.1%

Kansas	2.5%
North Carolina	2.4%
Vermont	2.4%
Idaho	2.3%
Nebraska	2.3%
Wisconsin	2.2%
Ohio	2.1%
Maine	2.0%
Louisiana	1.8%
Missouri	1.8%
Oklahoma	1.8%
Indiana	1.7%
South Carolina	1.5%
Tennessee	1.5%
Iowa	1.4%
Montana	1.3%
Wyoming	1.1%
Arkansas	1.1%
Kentucky	1.1%
North Dakota	1.0%
Alabama	1.0%
Mississippi	0.9%
South Dakota	0.8%
West Virginia	0.8%

Conclusion

The growth of the immigrant population since 2000, as well as the dispersion of immigration to new destinations and its role in shoring up the populations of some states, highlights the profound importance of immigration to the U.S. labor force. As a recent study by the Migration Policy Institute concluded, immigrant workers will likely account for between one-third and one-half of total U.S. labor-force growth through 2030.⁴ The breadth and depth of this phenomenon contrasts with the failure of Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform to adjust our nation’s immigration laws to match demographic reality. Much more is needed in terms of admissions policy, including new categories of permanent and temporary visas for workers, family members, students, and other visitors, as well as the lifting of arbitrary numerical caps on immigration. Lawmakers also need to devote greater attention to settlement policy, such as English-language instruction and assistance with meeting other requirements for naturalization, to better integrate immigrants into U.S. society and increase their contributions to the U.S. economy. One can only hope that our lawmakers finally open their eyes to the demographic march of immigration.

⁴ B. Lindsay Lowell, Julia Gelatt & Jeanne Batalova, *Immigrants and Labor Force Trends: The Future, Past, and Present*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, July 2006, p. 1.