



August 15, 2006

New Data Shows Immigrants' Growth and Reach

By [RICK LYMAN](#)

The number of immigrants living in American households rose 16 percent over the last five years, fueled largely by recent arrivals from Mexico, according to fresh data released by the [Census Bureau](#).

And increasingly, immigrants are bypassing the traditional gateway states like California and New York and settling directly in parts of the country that until recently saw little immigrant activity — regions like the Upper Midwest, New England and the Rocky Mountain States.

Coming in the heart of an election season in which illegal [immigration](#) has emerged as an issue, the new data from the bureau's 2005 American Community Survey is certain to generate more debate. But more than that, demographers said, it highlights one reason immigration has become such a heated topic.

"What's happening now is that immigrants are showing up in many more communities all across the country than they have ever been in," said Audrey Singer, an immigration fellow at the [Brookings Institution](#). "So it's easy for people to look around and not just see them, but feel the impact they're having in their communities. And a lot of these are communities that are not accustomed to seeing immigrants in their schools, at the workplace, in their hospitals."

By far the largest numbers of immigrants continue to live in the six states that have traditionally attracted them: California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey and Illinois.

Immigrants also continue to flow into a handful of states in the Southeast, like Georgia and North Carolina, a trend that was discerned in the 2000 census.

But it is in the less-expected immigrant destinations that demographers find the most of interest in the new data.

Indiana saw a 34 percent increase in the number of immigrants; South Dakota saw a 44 percent rise; Delaware 32 percent; Missouri 31 percent; Colorado 28 percent; and New Hampshire 26 percent.

“It’s the continuation of a pattern that we first began to see 10 or 15 years ago,” said Jeff Passel, senior research associate at the Pew Hispanic Center, who has examined the new census data. “But instead of being confined to areas like the Southeast, it’s beginning to spill over into some Midwestern states, like Indiana and Ohio. It’s even moving up into New England.”

Over all, immigrants now make up 12.4 percent of the nation’s population, up from 11.2 percent in 2000. That amounts to an estimated 4.9 million additional immigrants for a total of 35.7 million, a number larger than the population of California.

Unlike the full census, which measures all population, the American Community Survey covers only what census officials call “household” population — that is, people living in households, rather than in “group quarters” like universities, long-term care facilities and prisons.

Thus, the 16 percent increase in immigrants since 2000 refers only to the household population. (The nation’s household population in 2005 was 288,378,137, up from 273,637,296 in 2000.)

From 1990 to 2000, the total population showed a 57 percent increase in the foreign-born population, to 31.1 million, from 19.8 million.

Still, the rise in the immigrant household population since 2000 seems to indicate that the blazing pace of immigration seen throughout the 1990’s has continued into the first half of this decade.

And along with the increase in the overall number of immigrants, the survey found an increase in the numbers who are not [United States](#) citizens — an estimated 2.4 million more since 2000. The survey did not try to distinguish between noncitizens in the country legally, like students or guest workers, and those in the country illegally.

Georgia and North Carolina, states that had already seen significant increases in their immigrant population in the 1990’s, continue to see rising numbers. In Georgia, for instance, foreign-born residents accounted for 7.2 percent of the state’s population in 2000, and 9 percent in 2005.

“We’ve been getting very diverse down here,” said Judy Hadley, statistical research analyst for the Georgia Office of Planning and Budget. “You name any country and we’ve got it.”

Ms. Singer pointed out that much of the growth in immigrants was in “suburban areas and a lot of other places that really have no history of immigration.”

Immigration was just one area covered by the first release of data from the American Community Survey,

which also covered such demographic information as race, age, education and marital status.

The survey detected a significant increase in the number of Americans over age 25 who hold a bachelor's degree or higher — 27.2 percent of that population in 2005 compared with 24.4 percent in 2000.

This contributes to what has been a half-decade surge in Americans' educational attainment. In 1940, only 4.6 percent of Americans held a bachelor's degree.

The survey found that the percentage of Americans who are 65 or over is shrinking, from 12.6 percent of the population in 1990 to 12.4 percent in 2000 and 12.1 percent in 2005.

Partly, this is driven by the huge influx in immigrants, who tend to be of working age or younger. But demographers caution against seeing this as a long-term trend.

"It's more like the lull before the storm," said William H. Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution. "Before long, the baby boomers are going to start getting into that age group in large numbers and the percentage will shoot up."

The survey is intended as an annual bolster to the bureau's constitutionally mandated census of the country's population every 10 years. It began as a test program in 1996 and has gradually expanded to where it can now provide detailed data for nearly 7,000 geographic areas, including all Congressional districts and counties or cities of 65,000 or more.

In coming months, more data from the survey will cover income, poverty and housing.

Besides getting larger, the survey found shifts in the composition of the nation's immigrant population.

"Essentially, it's a continuation of the Mexicanization of U.S. immigration," said Steven Camarota, director of research at the Center for Immigration Studies. "You would expect Mexicans to be increasing their share in places like Georgia and North Carolina, which already saw some increases, but they've also increased their share of the population, and quite dramatically, in states like Michigan, Delaware and Montana."

More of America's immigrants, legal or not, come from Mexico than any other country, an estimated 11 million in 2005, compared with nearly 1.8 million Chinese and 1.4 million Indians.

Conversely, the percentage of immigrants who were born in European countries has dropped sharply — 29.4 percent in the last five years, demographers say, because immigrants who came to the United States

in the mid-20th century are now dying.

A study of this data by Mr. Passel for the Pew Hispanic Center showed that while 58 percent of the immigrants who arrived in the United States since 2000 settled in 5 of the traditional gateway states, 24 percent settled in 9 second-tier states (including Georgia, Massachusetts and Washington) and 11 percent found homes in 11 third-tier states, many of which have seen little immigration before (stretching from Connecticut to Minnesota to Nevada).

And while many of those first- and second-tier states saw the largest numbers of new arrivals from Mexico, Mr. Passel found, it was some of the third-tier states that saw the largest percentage increases: Alabama, South Carolina, Missouri, Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Two decades ago, demographers said, some 75 percent to 80 percent of new immigrants settled in one of the half-dozen gateway states and tended to stay there. Then, in the last 10 to 15 years, the pattern shifted and increasing numbers began to stay in the gateways briefly and then move. Now, they say, the pattern is that more immigrants are simply bypassing the gateways altogether.

“The biggest thing that drives immigration to specific destinations is that the immigrant already knows someone who is living there,” Mr. Camarota said.

The common pattern, demographers said, is that a handful of immigrants move to a new region from one of the gateway states and put down roots. Then, once settled, they become a pipeline for others in their family or their home village to move directly into the same area.

“It’s looking like what happens is that a person from a given community, say in Nicaragua, is getting established,” said Bob Coats, the governor’s census liaison in North Carolina. “And then they send word home that they have a good job and other people — neighbors, family members — come to join them and you have these enclaves of people from one country, one region, becoming established in the same area.”

Brenda Goodman contributed reporting from Atlanta for this article.

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)