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AUGUST 20, 2020



Key findings about U.S. immigrants

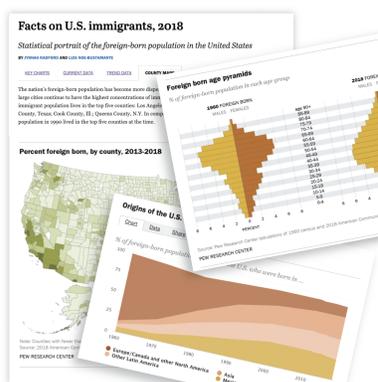
BY [ABBY BUDIMAN](#)



Immigrants listen to a speech as they wait to become U.S. citizens at a naturalization ceremony in Los Angeles. (Mark Ralson/AFP/Getty Images)

The United States has more immigrants than [any other country in the world](#). Today, more than 40 million people living in the U.S. were born in another country, accounting for

about one-fifth of the world's migrants. The population of immigrants is also very diverse, with just about every country in the world represented among U.S. immigrants.



View interactive charts and detailed tables on U.S. immigrants.

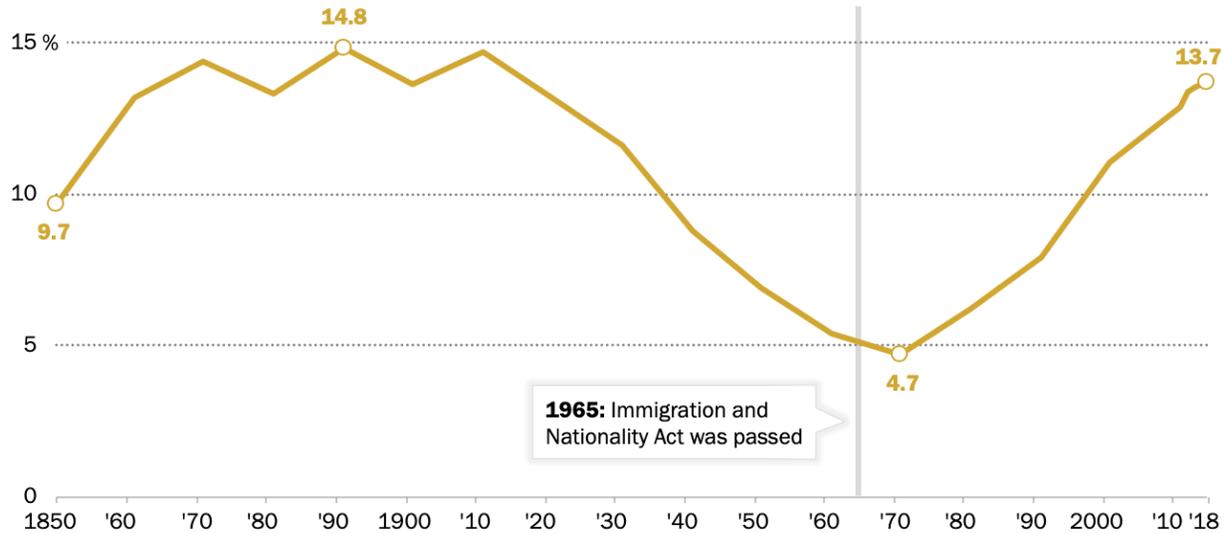
Pew Research Center regularly publishes [statistical portraits](#) of the nation's foreign-born population, which include [historical trends since 1960](#). Based on these portraits, here are answers to some key questions about the U.S. immigrant population.

How many people in the U.S. are immigrants?

The U.S. foreign-born population reached a record 44.8 million in 2018. Since 1965, when U.S. immigration laws [replaced a national quota system](#), the number of immigrants living in the U.S. has more than quadrupled. Immigrants today account for 13.7% of the U.S. population, nearly triple the share (4.8%) in 1970. However, today's immigrant share remains below the record 14.8% share in 1890, when 9.2 million immigrants lived in the U.S.

Immigrant share of U.S. population nears historic high

% of U.S. population that is foreign born



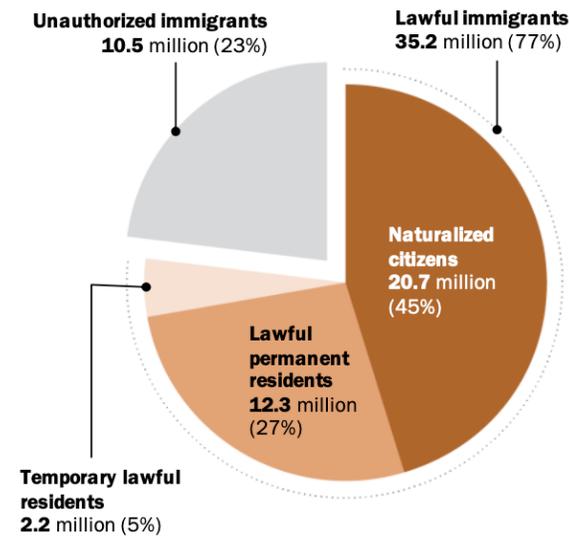
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000" and Pew Research Center tabulations of 2010-2018 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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What is the legal status of immigrants in the U.S.?

Unauthorized immigrants are almost a quarter of U.S. foreign-born population

Foreign-born population estimates, 2017



Note: Figures for the total and subgroups differ from published U.S. Census Bureau totals because census data have been augmented and adjusted to account for undercount of the population. All numbers are rounded. Unauthorized immigrants include some with temporary protection from deportation under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), as well as pending asylum cases.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented U.S. Census Bureau data.

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Most immigrants (77%) are in the country legally, while almost a quarter are unauthorized, according to [new Pew Research Center estimates based on census data adjusted for undercount](#). In 2017, 45% were naturalized U.S. citizens.

Some 27% of immigrants were permanent residents and 5% were temporary residents in 2017. Another 23% of all immigrants were unauthorized immigrants. From 1990 to 2007, the [unauthorized immigrant population](#) more than tripled in size – from 3.5 million to a record high of 12.2 million in 2007. By 2017, that number had declined by 1.7 million, or 14%. There were 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. in 2017, accounting for 3.2% of the nation's population.

The decline in the unauthorized immigrant population is due largely to a fall in the number from Mexico – the single largest group of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. Between 2007 and 2017, this group decreased by 2 million. Meanwhile, there was a [rise in the number from Central America and Asia](#).

Do all lawful immigrants choose to become U.S. citizens?

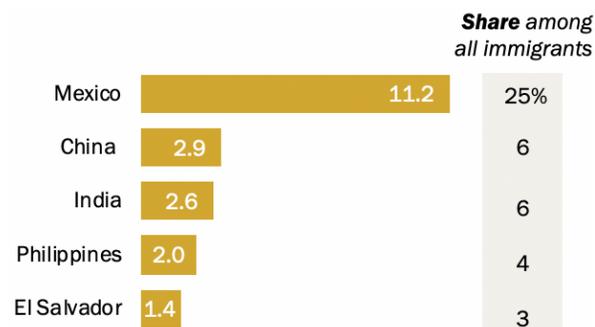
Not all lawful permanent residents choose to pursue U.S. citizenship. Those who wish to do so may apply after [meeting certain requirements](#), including having lived in the U.S. for five years. In fiscal year 2019, about 800,000 immigrants applied for naturalization. The number of [naturalization applications has climbed](#) in recent years, though the annual totals remain below the 1.4 million applications filed in 2007.

Generally, most immigrants eligible for naturalization apply to become citizens. However, Mexican lawful immigrants have the lowest naturalization rate overall. Language and personal barriers, lack of interest and financial barriers are among the top reasons for choosing not to naturalize cited by Mexican-born green card holders, [according to a 2015 Pew Research Center survey](#).

Where do immigrants come from?

Mexico, China and India are among top birthplaces for immigrants in the U.S.

Top five countries of birth for immigrants in the U.S. in 2018, in millions



Note: China includes Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mongolia.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2018 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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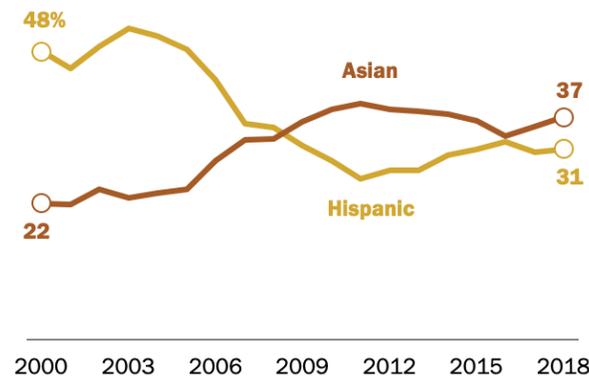
Mexico is the [top origin country](#) of the U.S. immigrant population. In 2018, roughly 11.2 million immigrants living in the U.S. were from there, accounting for 25% of all U.S. immigrants. The next largest origin groups were those from China (6%), India (6%), the Philippines (4%) and El Salvador (3%).

By region of birth, immigrants from Asia combined accounted for 28% of all immigrants, close to the share of immigrants from Mexico (25%). Other regions make up smaller shares: Europe, Canada and other North America (13%), the Caribbean (10%), Central America (8%), South America (7%), the Middle East and North Africa (4%) and sub-Saharan Africa (5%).

Who is arriving today?

Among new immigrant arrivals, Asians outnumber Hispanics

% of immigrants arriving in the U.S. in each year who are ...



Note: Figures for 2000 to 2004 are based on the household population and do not include arrivals residing in group quarters. For 2000-2017, the shares are computed using immigrants who arrived in the year before the ACS surveys of 2001-2018; for 2018, based on those arriving in 2018 in the 2018 ACS. Race and ethnicity based on self-reports. Asians include only single-race non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2001-2018 American Community Surveys (IPUMS).

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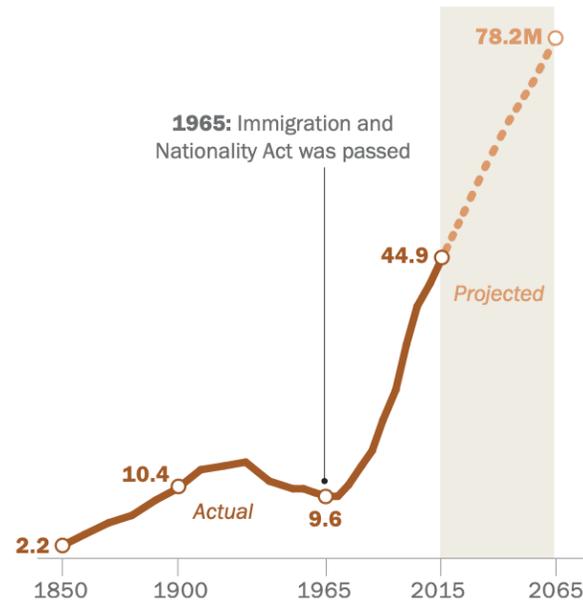
More than 1 million immigrants arrive in the U.S. each year. In 2018, the top country of origin for new immigrants coming into the U.S. was China, with 149,000 people, followed by India (129,000), Mexico (120,000) and the Philippines (46,000).

By race and ethnicity, more Asian immigrants than Hispanic immigrants have arrived in the U.S. in most years since 2009. Immigration from Latin America slowed following the Great Recession, particularly for Mexico, which has seen both decreasing flows into the United States and large flows back to Mexico in recent years.

Asians are projected to become the [largest immigrant group](#) in the U.S. by 2055, surpassing Hispanics. Pew Research Center estimates indicate that in 2065, those who identify as Asian will make up some 38% of all immigrants; as Hispanic, 31%; White, 20%; and Black, 9%.

Is the immigrant population growing?

U.S. foreign-born population reached 45 million in 2015, projected to reach 78 million by 2065



Source: Gibson and Jung (2006) for 1850 to 1890; Edmonston and Passel (1994) estimates for 1900-1955; Pew Research Center estimates for 1960-2015 based on adjusted census data; Pew Research Center projections for 2015-2065.

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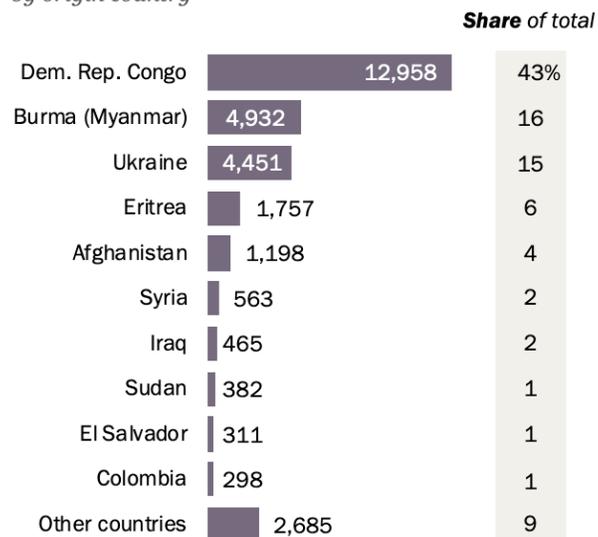
New immigrant arrivals have fallen, mainly due to a decrease in the number of unauthorized immigrants coming to the U.S. The drop in the unauthorized immigrant population can primarily be attributed to more Mexican immigrants [leaving the U.S. than coming in](#).

Looking forward, immigrants and their descendants are projected to account for 88% of [U.S. population growth through 2065](#), assuming current immigration trends continue. In addition to new arrivals, U.S. births to immigrant parents will be important to future growth in the country's population. In 2018, the percentage of women giving birth in the past year was higher among immigrants (7.5%) than among the U.S. born (5.7%). While U.S.-born women gave birth to more than 3 million children that year, immigrant women gave birth to about 760,000.

How many immigrants have come to the U.S. as refugees?

More than half of U.S. refugees in 2019 were from D.R. Congo and Burma

Number of refugees entering the U.S. in fiscal 2019, by origin country



Note: Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants.

Source: U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center accessed October 2019.

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Since the creation of the federal [Refugee Resettlement Program](#) in 1980, [about 3 million refugees](#) have been resettled in the U.S. – more than any other country.

In fiscal 2019, a total of 30,000 [refugees](#) were resettled in the U.S. The largest origin group of refugees was the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Burma (Myanmar), Ukraine, Eritrea and Afghanistan. Among all refugees admitted in fiscal year 2019, 4,900 are Muslims (16%) and 23,800 are Christians (79%). [Texas, Washington, New York and California](#) resettled more than a quarter of all refugees admitted in fiscal 2018.

Where do most U.S. immigrants live?

Nearly half (45%) of the nation's immigrants live in just three states: [California \(24%\)](#), [Texas \(11%\)](#) and [Florida \(10%\)](#). California had the largest immigrant population of any state in 2018, at 10.6 million. [Texas, Florida](#) and New York had more than 4 million immigrants each.

In terms of regions, about two-thirds of immigrants lived in the West (34%) and South (34%). Roughly one-fifth lived in the Northeast (21%) and 11% were in the Midwest.

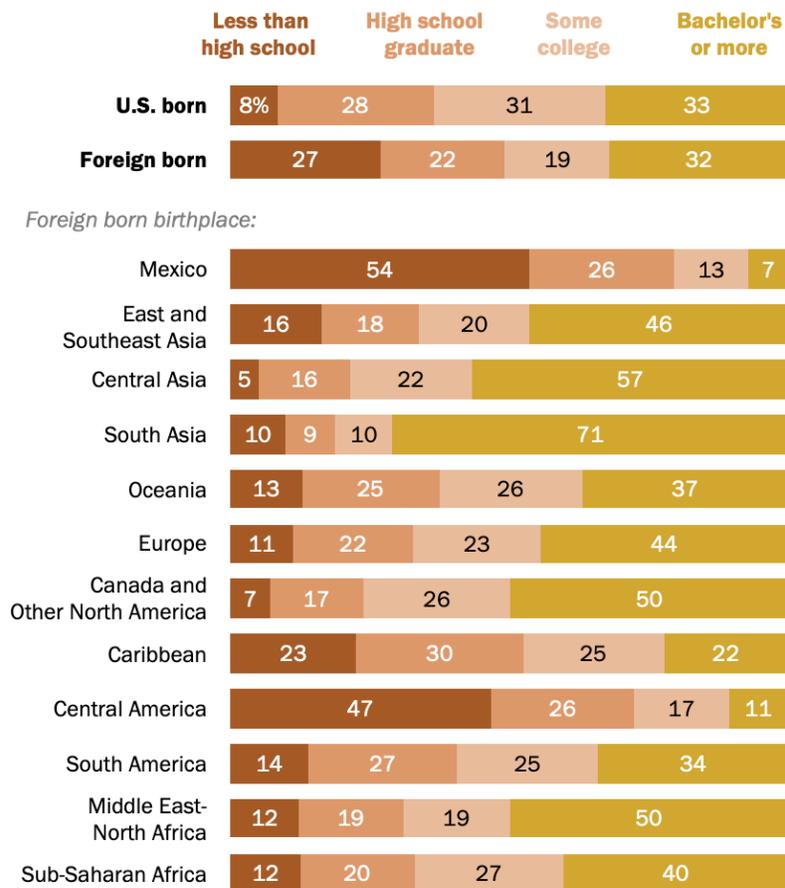
In 2018, most immigrants lived in just 20 major metropolitan areas, with the largest populations in the New York, Los Angeles and Miami metro areas. These top 20 metro areas were home to 28.7 million immigrants, or 64% of the nation's total foreign-born

population. Most of the nation's [unauthorized immigrant population](#) lived in these top metro areas as well.

How do immigrants compare with the U.S. population overall in education?

Educational attainment among U.S. immigrants, 2018

% among those ages 25 and older



Note: "Some college" includes those with two-year degrees. "High school graduate" includes those with a high school diploma or its equivalent, such as a GED certificate. Middle East consists of Southwest Asia and North Africa. Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 2018 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Immigrants in the U.S. as a whole have lower levels of education than the U.S.-born population. In 2018, immigrants were over three times as likely as the U.S. born to have not completed high school (27% vs. 8%). However, immigrants were just as likely as the U.S. born to have a bachelor's degree or more (32% and 33%, respectively).

Educational attainment varies among the nation's immigrant groups, particularly across immigrants from different regions of the world. Immigrants from Mexico and Central America are less likely to be high school graduates than the U.S. born (54% and 47%, respectively, do not have a high school diploma, vs. 8% of U.S. born). On the other hand, immigrants from every region *except* Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America were as likely as or more likely than U.S.-born residents to have a bachelor's or advanced degree.

Among all immigrants, those from South Asia (71%) were the most likely to have a bachelor's degree or more. Immigrants from Mexico (7%) and Central America (11%) were

the least likely to have a bachelor's or higher.

How many immigrants are working in the U.S.?

Total U.S. labor force grows since 2007, but number of unauthorized immigrant workers declines

Labor force estimates, in millions

	2017	2007	Change
U.S. total	164.4	153.3	+11.2
U.S. born	135.7	127.9	+7.8
Lawful immigrant	21.2	17.2	+4.0
Unauthorized immigrant	7.6	8.2	-0.6

Note: All numbers are rounded; changes calculated from unrounded numbers. Based on civilian labor force.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented U.S. Census Bureau data.

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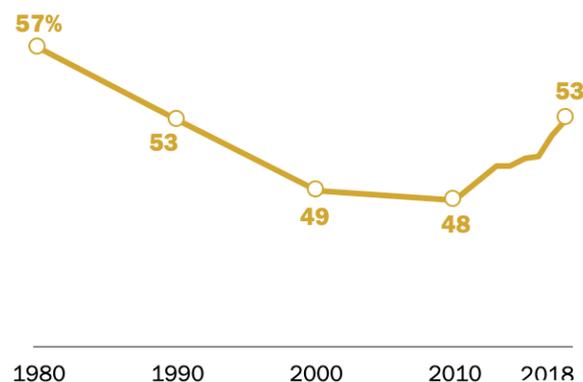
In 2017, about 29 million immigrants were working or looking for work in the U.S., making up some 17% of the total civilian labor force. Lawful immigrants made up the majority of the immigrant workforce, at 21.2 million. An additional [7.6 million immigrant workers are unauthorized immigrants](#), less than the total of the previous year and notably less than in 2007, when they were 8.2 million. They alone account for 4.6% of the civilian labor force, a dip from their peak of 5.4% in 2007. During the same period, the overall U.S. workforce grew, as did the number of U.S.-born workers and lawful immigrant workers.

Immigrants are projected to [drive future growth in the U.S. working-age population](#) through at least 2035. As the Baby Boom generation heads into retirement, immigrants and their children are expected to offset a decline in the working-age population by adding about 18 million people of working age between 2015 and 2035.

How well do immigrants speak English?

Half of immigrants in U.S. are English proficient as of 2018

% of foreign-born population ages 5 and older who are English proficient



Note: English proficient are those who speak only English at home or if they speak a non-English language at home, they indicate they can speak English at least “very well.”

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 1980-2000 decennial censuses and 2010, 2013-2018 American Community Surveys (IPUMS).

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Among immigrants ages 5 and older in 2018, half (53%) are proficient English speakers – either speaking English very well (37%) or only speaking English at home (17%).

Immigrants from Mexico have the lowest rates of English proficiency (34%), followed by those from Central America (35%), East and Southeast Asia (50%) and South America (56%). Immigrants from Canada (96%), Oceania (82%), Europe (75%) and sub-Saharan Africa (74%) have the highest rates of English proficiency.

The [longer immigrants have lived in the U.S.](#), the greater the likelihood they are English proficient. Some 47% of immigrants living in the U.S. five years or less are proficient. By contrast, more than half (57%) of immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for 20 years or more are proficient English speakers.

Among immigrants ages 5 and older, [Spanish is the most commonly spoken language](#). Some 42% of immigrants in the U.S. speak Spanish at home. The top five languages spoken at home among immigrants outside of Spanish are English only (17%), followed by Chinese (6%), Hindi (5%), Filipino/Tagalog (4%) and French (3%).

How many immigrants have been deported recently?

Around 337,000 immigrants were [deported from the U.S. in fiscal 2018](#), up since 2017. Overall, the Obama administration deported about 3 million immigrants between 2009 and 2016, a significantly higher number than the 2 million immigrants deported by the

Bush administration between 2001 and 2008. In 2017, the Trump administration deported 295,000 immigrants, the lowest total since 2006.

Immigrants convicted of a crime made up the less than half of deportations in 2018, the most recent year for which statistics by criminal status are available. Of the 337,000 immigrants deported in 2018, some 44% had criminal convictions and 56% were not convicted of a crime. From 2001 to 2018, a majority (60%) of immigrants deported have not been convicted of a crime.

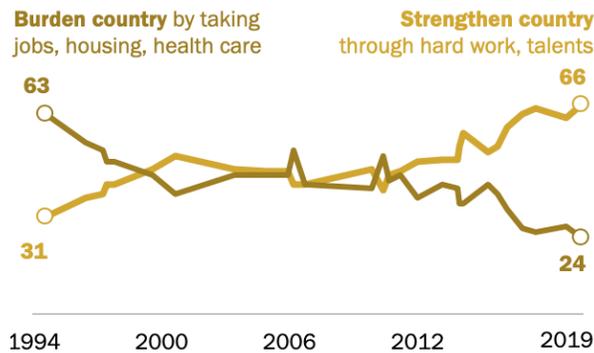
How many immigrant apprehensions take place at the U.S.-Mexico border?

The number of apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border has doubled from fiscal 2018 to fiscal 2019, from 396,579 in fiscal 2018 to 851,508 in fiscal 2019. Today, there are [more apprehensions of non-Mexicans than Mexicans](#) at the border. In fiscal 2019, apprehensions of Central Americans at the border exceeded those of Mexicans for the fourth consecutive year. The first time Mexicans did not make up the bulk of Border Patrol apprehensions was in 2014.

How do Americans view immigrants and immigration?

U.S. immigrants are seen more as a strength than a burden to the country

% who say immigrants today ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Phone surveys of U.S. adults conducted 1994-2019.

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While immigration has been at the forefront of a national political debate, the U.S. public holds a range of views about immigrants living in the country. Overall, a majority of Americans have positive views about immigrants. About two-thirds of Americans (66%) say immigrants [strengthen the country](#) “because of their hard work and talents,” while about a quarter (24%) say immigrants burden the country by taking jobs, housing and health care.

Yet these views vary starkly by political affiliation. Among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents, 88% think immigrants strengthen the country with their hard work and talents, and just 8% say they are a burden. Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, 41% say immigrants strengthen the country, while 44% say they burden it.

[Americans were divided](#) on future levels of immigration. A quarter said legal immigration to the U.S. should be decreased (24%), while one-third (38%) said immigration should be kept at its present level and almost another third (32%) said immigration should be increased.

Note: This is an update of a post originally published May 3, 2017, and written by Gustavo López, a former research analyst focusing on Hispanics, immigration and demographics; and Kristen Bialik, a former research assistant.

CORRECTION (Sept. 21, 2020): An update to the methodology used to tabulate figures in the chart “Among new immigrant arrivals, Asians outnumber Hispanics” has changed all figures from 2001 and 2012. This new methodology has also allowed the inclusion of the figure from 2000. Furthermore, the earlier version of the chart incorrectly showed

the partial year shares of Hispanic and Asian recent arrivals in 2015; the corrected complete year shares are 31% and 36%, respectively.

Topics [Immigration & Migration](#), [Unauthorized Immigration](#), [Immigrant Populations](#)

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