**Immigration to the United States**

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2000 [Census](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Census) population ancestry map

**Immigration to the United States** is a complex demographic phenomenon that has been a major source of [population growth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_growth) and cultural change throughout much of the [history of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_States). The economic, social, and political aspects of immigration have caused controversy regarding ethnicity, economic benefits, jobs for non-immigrants, settlement patterns, impact on upward [social mobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_mobility), crime, and voting behavior. On a per capita basis, the United States lets in fewer immigrants than half the countries in the [OECD](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OECD). Prior to 1965, policies such as the [national origins formula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Origins_Formula) limited [immigration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration) and [naturalization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization) opportunities for people from areas outside [Western Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Europe).

The [civil rights movement of the 1960s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_%281955%E2%80%9368%29) led to the [replacement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_and_Nationality_Act_of_1965) of these ethnic quotas with per-country limits. Since then, the number of first-generation immigrants living in the United States has quadrupled, from 9.6 million in 1970 to about 38 million in 2007. Nearly 14 million immigrants entered the United States from 2000 to 2010, and over one million persons were [naturalized](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization) as U.S. citizens in 2008. The per-country limit applies the same maximum on the number of visas to all countries regardless of their population and has therefore had the effect of significantly restricting immigration of persons born in populous nations such as [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico), [China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China), [India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India), and the [Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines) – the leading countries of origin for legally admitted immigrants to the United States in 2013; nevertheless, China, India, and Mexico were the leading countries of origin for immigrants overall to the United States in 2013, regardless of legal status, according to a [U.S. Census Bureau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Census_Bureau) study. As of 2009[[update]](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Immigration_to_the_United_States&action=edit), 66% of legal immigrants were admitted on the basis of family ties, along with 13% admitted for their employment skills and 17% for humanitarian reasons.

Migration is difficult, expensive, and dangerous for those who enter the US illegally across the [Mexico–United States border](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico%E2%80%93United_States_border). Virtually all undocumented immigrants have no avenues for legal entry to the United States due the restrictive legal limits on [green cards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permanent_residence_%28United_States%29), and lack of immigrant [visas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_visa) for low skilled workers. Participants in debates on immigration in the early twenty-first century called for increasing enforcement of existing laws governing [illegal immigration to the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigration_to_the_United_States), building a barrier along some or all of the 2,000-mile (3,200 km) U.S.-Mexico border, or creating a new [guest worker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guest_worker) program. Through much of 2006 the country and Congress was immersed in a debate about these proposals. As of April 2010[[update]](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Immigration_to_the_United_States&action=edit) few of these proposals had become law, though a partial border fence had been approved and subsequently canceled.

**History**

Main article: [History of immigration to the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_immigration_to_the_United_States)

American immigration history can be viewed in four epochs: the colonial period, the mid-19th century, the start of the 20th century, and post-1965. Each period brought distinct national groups, races and ethnicities to the United States. During the 17th century, approximately 400,000 English people migrated to Colonial America. Over half of all European immigrants to Colonial America during the 17th and 18th centuries arrived as [indentured servants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indentured_servant). The mid-19th century saw mainly an influx from northern Europe; the early 20th-century mainly from Southern and Eastern Europe; post-1965 mostly from Latin America and Asia.

Immigrants arriving at [Ellis Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellis_Island), 1902

Historians estimate that fewer than 1 million immigrants came to the United States from Europe between 1600 and 1799. The [1790 Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization_Act_of_1790) limited naturalization to "free white persons"; it was expanded to include blacks in the 1860s and Asians in the 1950s. In the early years of the United States, immigration was fewer than 8,000 people a year, including French refugees from the slave revolt in Haiti. After 1820, immigration gradually increased. From 1836 to 1914, over 30 million Europeans migrated to the United States. The death rate on these transatlantic voyages was high, during which one in seven travelers died. In 1875, the nation passed its first immigration law, the [Page Act of 1875](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Page_Act_of_1875).

The peak year of European immigration was in 1907, when 1,285,349 persons entered the country. By 1910, 13.5 million immigrants were living in the United States. In 1921, the Congress passed the [Emergency Quota Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency_Quota_Act), followed by the [Immigration Act of 1924](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1924). The 1924 Act was aimed at further restricting immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, particularly Jews, Italians, and Slavs, who had begun to enter the country in large numbers beginning in the 1890s.

Polish immigrants working on the farm, 1909. The [welfare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_programs_in_the_United_States) system was practically non-existent before the 1930s and the economic pressures on the poor were giving rise to child labor.

Immigration patterns of the 1930s were dominated by the [Great Depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression). In the final prosperous year, 1929, there were 279,678 immigrants recorded, but in 1933, only 23,068 came to the U.S. In the early 1930s, more people emigrated from the United States than to it. The U.S. government sponsored a [Mexican Repatriation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_Repatriation) program which was intended to encourage people to voluntarily move to Mexico, but thousands were deported against their will. Altogether about 400,000 Mexicans were repatriated. Most of the Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis and World War II were barred from coming to the United States. In the post-war era, the Justice Department launched [Operation Wetback](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Wetback), under which 1,075,168 Mexicans were deported in 1954.

First, our cities will not be flooded with a million immigrants annually. Under the proposed bill, the present level of immigration remains substantially the same.... Secondly, the ethnic mix of this country will not be upset.... Contrary to the charges in some quarters, [the bill] will not inundate America with immigrants from any one country or area, or the most populated and deprived nations of Africa and Asia.... In the final analysis, the ethnic pattern of immigration under the proposed measure is not expected to change as sharply as the critics seem to think.

*—*[*Ted Kennedy*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Kennedy)*, chief Senate sponsor of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.*

The [Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_and_Nationality_Act_of_1965), also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, abolished the system of national-origin quotas. By equalizing immigration policies, the act resulted in new immigration from non-[European](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe) nations, which changed [the ethnic make-up of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_States). In 1970, 60% of immigrants were from Europe; this decreased to 15% by 2000. In 1990, [George H. W. Bush](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_H._W._Bush) signed the [Immigration Act of 1990](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1990), which increased legal immigration to the United States by 40%. In 1991, Bush signed the [Armed Forces Immigration Adjustment Act 1991](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Armed_Forces_Immigration_Adjustment_Act), allowing foreign service members who had serve 12 or more years in the US Armed Forces to qualify for permanent residency and, in some cases, citizenship.

Appointed by Bill Clinton, the [U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_laws_concerning_immigration_and_naturalization_in_the_United_States#1990s) recommended reducing legal immigration from about 800,000 people per year to approximately 550,000. While an influx of new residents from different cultures presents some challenges, "the United States has always been energized by its immigrant populations," said President [Bill Clinton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Clinton) in 1998. "America has constantly drawn strength and spirit from wave after wave of immigrants [...] They have proved to be the most restless, the most adventurous, the most innovative, the most industrious of people."

Nearly 8 million people immigrated to the United States from 2000 to 2005; 3.7 million of them entered without papers. Since 1986 Congress has passed seven amnesties for undocumented immigrants. In 1986 president Ronald Reagan signed immigration reform that gave amnesty to 3 million undocumented immigrants in the country. Hispanic immigrants suffered job losses during the late-2000s recession, but since the recession's end in June 2009, immigrants posted a net gain of 656,000 jobs. Over 1 million immigrants were granted legal residence in 2011.

[Boston Chinatown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Chinatown), Massachusetts, 2008.

Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status Fiscal Years

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** |  | **Year** |  | **Year** |  | **Year** |  | **Year** |  |
| 1950 | 249,187 | 1970 | 373,326 | 1990 | 1,535,872 | 2006 | 1,266,129 | 2010 | 1,042,625 |
| 1955 | 237,790 | 1975 | 385,378 | 1995 | 720,177 | 2007 | 1,052,415 | 2011 | 1,062,040 |
| 1960 | 265,398 | 1980 | 524,295 | 2000 | 841,002 | 2008 | 1,107,126 | 2012 | 1,031,631 |
| 1965 | 296,697 | 1985 | 568,149 | 2005 | 1,122,257 | 2009 | 1,130,818 | 2013 | 990,553 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Decade** | **Average per year** |
| 1960–69 | 321,375 |
| 1970–79 | 424,820 |
| 1980–89 | 624,438 |
| 1990–99 | 977,534 |
| 2000–09 | 1,029,943 |
| 2010–13 | 1,031,712 |

Source: US Department of Homeland Security, *Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status: Fiscal Years 1950 to 2013*

**Contemporary immigration**

Until the 1930s most legal immigrants were male. By the 1990s women accounted for just over half of all legal immigrants. Contemporary immigrants tend to be younger than the native population of the United States, with people between the ages of 15 and 34 substantially overrepresented. Immigrants are also more likely to be married and less likely to be divorced than native-born Americans of the same age.

Naturalization ceremony, [Salem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salem%2C_Massachusetts), Massachusetts, 2007

[Paterson, New Jersey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paterson%2C_New_Jersey), within the [New York City Metropolitan Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City_Metropolitan_Area), is becoming an increasingly popular destination for [Muslim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_the_United_States) immigrants.

Immigrants are likely to move to and live in areas populated by people with similar backgrounds. This phenomenon has held true throughout the history of immigration to the United States. Seven out of ten immigrants surveyed by [Public Agenda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Agenda) in 2009 said they intended to make the U.S. their permanent home, and 71% said if they could do it over again they would still come to the US. In the same study, 76% of immigrants say the government has become stricter on enforcing immigration laws since the [September 11, 2001 attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11%2C_2001_attacks) ("9/11"), and 24% report that they personally have experienced some or a great deal of discrimination.

Public attitudes about immigration in the U.S. were heavily influenced in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. After the attacks, 52% of Americans believed that immigration was a good thing overall for the U.S., down from 62% the year before, according to a 2009 Gallup poll. A 2008 Public Agenda survey found that half of Americans said tighter controls on immigration would do "a great deal" to enhance U.S. national security. Harvard political scientist and historian [Samuel P. Huntington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_P._Huntington) argued in [Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who_Are_We%3F_The_Challenges_to_America%27s_National_Identity) that a potential future consequence of continuing massive immigration from Latin America, especially Mexico, might lead to the bifurcation of the United States.

The population of illegal Mexican immigrants in the US fell from approximately 7 million in 2007 to 6.1 million in 2011 Commentators link the reversal of the immigration trend to the economic downturn that started in 2008 and which meant fewer available jobs, and to the introduction of tough immigration laws in many states. According to the [Pew Hispanic Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pew_Hispanic_Center) the total number of Mexican born persons had stagnated in 2010, and tended toward going into negative figures.

More than 80 cities in the United States, including [Washington D.C.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_D.C.), [New York City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City), [Los Angeles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles), [Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago), [San Francisco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Francisco), [San Diego](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Diego), [San Jose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Jose%2C_California), [Salt Lake City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_Lake_City), [Phoenix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix%2C_Arizona), [Dallas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dallas), [Fort Worth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Worth%2C_Texas), [Houston](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Houston), [Detroit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Detroit), [Jersey City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jersey_City), [Minneapolis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minneapolis), [Miami](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miami), [Denver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denver), [Baltimore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltimore), [Seattle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seattle), [Portland, Oregon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portland%2C_Oregon) and [Portland, Maine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portland%2C_Maine), have [sanctuary policies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary_city), which vary locally.

**Ethnicity**

Inflow of New Legal Permanent Residents by continent in 2013:

[Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia) (40.43%)

[Americas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas) (40.04%)

[Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa) (9.92%)

[Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe) (8.74%)

[Australia and Oceania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australasia) (0.53%)

Unknown (0.33%)

Inflow of New Legal Permanent Residents by region, in 2012 and 2013

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Region** | **2012** | **2013** |
| Asia | 429,599 | 400,548 |
| Americas | 407,172 | 396,605 |
| Africa | 107,241 | 98,304 |
| Europe | 81,671 | 86,556 |
| Australia and Oceania | 4,742 | 5,277 |
| Unknown | 1,206 | 3,263 |
| **Total** | **1,031,631** | **990,553** |

Source: US Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

Top 10 sending countries in 2012 and 2013

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **2012** | **2013** |
| Mexico | 146,406 | 135,028 |
| China | 81,784 | 71,798 |
| India | 66,434 | 68,458 |
| Philippines | 57,327 | 54,446 |
| Dominican Republic | 41,566 | 41,311 |
| Cuba | 32,820 | 32,219 |
| Vietnam | 28,304 | 27,101 |
| South Korea | 20,846 | 23,166 |
| Colombia | 20,931 | 21,131 |
| Haiti | 22,818 | 20,351 |
| **Total** | **1,031,631** | **990,553** |

**New reasons for immigrating to the US**

Froma Harrop, of the [*Providence Journal*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Providence_Journal), has written about "environmental immigration," specifically wealthier Chinese nationals moving to or buying real estate in the US to escape China's heavy industrial pollution.

**Demography**

[Little Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Italy%2C_Manhattan) in New York, ca.1900

The United States admitted more legal immigrants from 1991 to 2000, between ten to eleven million, than in any previous decade. In the most recent decade, the ten million legal immigrants that settled in the U.S. represent an annual growth of only about 0.3% as the U.S. population grew from 249 million to 281 million. By comparison, the highest previous decade was the 1900s, when 8.8 million people arrived, increasing the total U.S. population by one percent every year. Specifically, "nearly 15% of Americans were foreign-born in 1910, while in 1999, only about 10% were foreign-born."

By 1970, immigrants accounted for 4.7 percent of the US population and rising to 6.2 percent in 1980, with an estimated 12.5 percent in 2009. As of 2010[[update]](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Immigration_to_the_United_States&action=edit), 25% of US residents under age 18 were first- or second-generation immigrants. Eight percent of all babies born in the U.S. in 2008 belonged to illegal immigrant parents, according to a recent analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by the Pew Hispanic Center.

Legal immigration to the U.S. increased from 250,000 in the 1930s, to 2.5 million in the 1950s, to 4.5 million in the 1970s, and to 7.3 million in the 1980s, before resting at about 10 million in the 1990s. Since 2000, legal immigrants to the United States number approximately 1,000,000 per year, of whom about 600,000 are *Change of Status* who already are in the U.S. Legal immigrants to the United States now are at their highest level ever, at just over 37,000,000 legal immigrants. Illegal immigration may be as high as 1,500,000 per year with a net of at least 700,000 illegal immigrants arriving every year. Immigration led to a 57.4% increase in foreign born population from 1990 to 2000.

Crowd at the [Philippine Independence Day Parade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine_Independence_Day_Parade) in New York City

While immigration has increased drastically over the last century, the foreign born share of the population was still higher in 1900 (about 20%) than it is today (about 10%). A number of factors may be attributed to the decrease in the representation of foreign born residents in the United States. Most significant has been the change in the composition of immigrants; prior to 1890, 82% of immigrants came from North and Western Europe. From 1891 to 1920, that number dropped to 25%, with a rise in immigrants from East, Central, and South Europe, summing up to 64%. Animosity towards these different and foreign immigrants rose in the United States, resulting in much legislation to limit immigration.

Contemporary immigrants settle predominantly in seven states, [California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California), [New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York), [Florida](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida), [Texas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas), [Pennsylvania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania), [New Jersey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Jersey) and [Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illinois), comprising about 44% of the U.S. population as a whole. The combined total immigrant population of these seven states was 70% of the total foreign-born population in 2000. If current [birth rate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_territories_by_fertility_rate) and immigration rates were to remain unchanged for another 70 to 80 years, the U.S. population would double to nearly 600 million.

The top twelve emigrant countries in 2006 were Mexico (173,753), People's Republic of China (87,345), Philippines (74,607), India (61,369), Cuba (45,614), Colombia (43,151), Dominican Republic (38,069), El Salvador (31,783), Vietnam (30,695), Jamaica (24,976), South Korea (24,386), and Guatemala (24,146). Other countries comprise an additional 606,370.

In 1900, when the U.S. population was 76 million, there were an estimated 500,000 Hispanics. The [Census Bureau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Census_Bureau) projects that by 2050, one-quarter of the population will be of Hispanic descent. This demographic shift is largely fueled by immigration from Latin America.

**Origin**



|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **500,000 +** | **200,000-499,999** | **100,000-199,999** | **50,000-99,999** |

Rate of immigration to the United States relative to sending countries' population size, 2006–2010. Foreign born population of the United States by country of birth in 2013 ([U.S. Census Bureau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Census_Bureau)) and number of immigrants between 1986 and 2012 by country of birth

A country is included in the table if it exceeded 50,000 in either category.

| **Country of birth** | **Population (2013)** | **Immigrants (1986-2012)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [**United States**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) | *316,497,531* | *3,132* |
| *Total foreign born* | *41,347,945* | *26,147,963* |
| [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico) | 11,584,977 | 5,551,757 |
| [China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) | 2,383,831 | 1,399,667 |
| [India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India) | 2,034,677 | 1,323,011 |
| [Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines) | 1,843,989 | 1,480,946 |
| [Vietnam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam) | 1,281,010 | 955,967 |
| [El Salvador](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Salvador) | 1,252,067 | 676,776 |
| [Cuba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba) | 1,144,024 | 666,657 |
| [Korea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korea) | 1,070,335 | 609,321 |
| [Dominican Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominican_Republic) | 991,046 | 904,721 |
| [Guatemala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guatemala) | 902,293 | 353,122 |
| [Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada) | 840,192 | 394,790 |
| [Jamaica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamaica) | 714,743 | 507,741 |
| [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) | 695,489 | 383,037 |
| [Colombia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colombia) | 677,231 | 498,551 |
| [Haiti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiti) | 593,980 | 536,657 |
| [Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) | 584,184 | 192,676 |
| [Honduras](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honduras) | 533,598 | 178,321 |
| [Peru](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peru) | 440,292 | 320,611 |
| [Poland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland) | 432,601 | 360,669 |
| [Ecuador](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecuador) | 427,906 | 243,217 |
| [Russia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) | 390,934 | 476,306 |
| [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran) | 363,972 | 358,586 |
| [Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy) | 354,305 | 69,111 |
| [Ukraine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine) | 345,187 | 306,203 |
| [Pakistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan) | 342,603 | 347,237 |
| [Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan) | 339,970 | 172,893 |
| [Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazil) | 337,040 | 214,266 |
| [Guyana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guyana) | 259,815 | 214,995 |
| [Nicaragua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua) | 240,619 | 191,701 |
| [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria) | 234,465 | 227,497 |
| [Thailand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thailand) | 233,547 | 174,168 |
| [Trinidad and Tobago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinidad_and_Tobago) | 232,026 | 157,689 |
| [Bangladesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh) | 203,179 | 215,164 |
| [Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq) | 200,894 | 153,897 |
| [Venezuela](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuela) | 197,724 | 143,411 |
| [Laos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laos) | 196,154 | 110,235 |
| [Ethiopia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia) | 195,805 | 202,518 |
| [Portugal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal) | 182,473 | 53,831 |
| [Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) | 176,443 | 153,755 |
| [France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France) | 170,394 | 87,601 |
| [Argentina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argentina) | 170,086 | 98,999 |
| [Cambodia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodia) | 164,746 | 106,183 |
| [Romania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania) | 157,302 | 140,887 |
| [Ghana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana) | 149,377 | 130,542 |
| [Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece) | 137,084 | 37,406 |
| [Republic of Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland) | 128,350 | 104,586 |
| [Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel) | 127,079 | 106,568 |
| [Lebanon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanon) | 124,256 | 113,727 |
| [Burma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar) | 116,775 | 94,792 |
| [Bosnia and Herzegovina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnia_and_Herzegovina) | 112,240 | 129,481 |
| [Kenya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya) | 110,678 | 92,891 |
| [Turkey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey) | 109,667 | 85,415 |
| [Spain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain) | 102,475 | 41,328 |
| [Panama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panama) | 101,024 | 57,628 |
| [Chile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chile) | 97,585 | 54,573 |
| [South Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Africa) | 95,191 | 69,992 |
| [Indonesia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia) | 94,600 | 61,493 |
| [Saudi Arabia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia) | 88,894 | n/a |
| [Nepal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal) | 87,456 | 58,841 |
| [Netherlands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands) | 85,085 | 35,117 |
| [Albania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albania) | 81,047 | 84,031 |
| [Bolivia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolivia) | 79,924 | 52,177 |
| [Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia) | 79,122 | 62,201 |
| [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria) | 78,934 | 68,864 |
| [Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia) | 78,909 | 74,632 |
| [Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia) | 78,797 | 12,926 |
| [Costa Rica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costa_Rica) | 78,659 | 47,648 |
| [Hungary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungary) | 74,213 | 31,365 |
| [Malaysia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia) | 68,956 | n/a |
| [Bulgaria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgaria) | 67,941 | 68,768 |
| [Afghanistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan) | 67,169 | 59,480 |
| [Jordan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan) | 65,618 | 104,168 |
| [Czech Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czech_Republic) | 64,354 | 27,354 |
| [Morocco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morocco) | 63,798 | 76,622 |
| [Barbados](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbados) | 52,499 | 25,444 |
| [Sri Lanka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) | 51,268 | 51,675 |
| [Belarus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus) | 50,934 | 58,254 |
| [Belize](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belize) | 50,296 | n/a |

Note: Counts of immigrants since 1986 for Russia includes "Soviet Union (former)", and for Czech Republic includes "Czechoslovakia (former)".

**Effects of immigration**

**Demographics**

A U.S. [naturalization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization) ceremony at the [Kennedy Space Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kennedy_Space_Center), 2010.

The Census Bureau estimates the US population will grow from 281 million in 2000 to 397 million in 2050 with immigration, but only to 328 million with no immigration. A 2008 report from the [Pew Research Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pew_Research_Center) projects that by 2050, non-Hispanic [whites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_American) will account for 47% of the population, down from the 2005 figure of 67%. Non-Hispanic whites made up 85% of the population in 1960. It also foresees the [Hispanic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispanic_and_Latino_Americans) population rising from 14% in 2005 to 29% by 2050. The [Asian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_American) population is expected to more than triple by 2050. Overall, the Pew Report predicts the population of the United States will rise from 296 million in 2005 to 438 million in 2050, with 82% of the increase from immigrants.

In 35 of the country's [50 largest cities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_largest_metropolitan_areas_in_the_Americas), non-Hispanic whites were at the last census or are predicted to be in the minority. In California, non-Hispanic whites slipped from 80% of the state's population in 1970 to 42.3% in 2001 and 39% in 2013.

Immigrant segregation declined in the first half of the 20th century, but has been rising over the past few decades. This has caused questioning of the correctness of describing the United States as a [melting pot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melting_pot). One explanation is that groups with lower socioeconomic status concentrate in more densely populated area that have access to [public transit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_transit) while groups with higher socioeconomic status move to [suburban](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suburban) areas. Another is that some recent immigrant groups are more culturally and linguistically different from earlier groups and prefer to live together due to factors such as communication costs. Another explanation for increased segregation is [white flight](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_flight).

Place of birth for the foreign-born population in the United States

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Top ten countries** | **2013** | **2010** | **2000** | **1990** |
| Mexico | 11,584,977 | 11,711,103 | 9,177,487 | 4,298,014 |
| China | 2,383,831 | 2,166,526 | 1,518,652 | 921,070 |
| India | 2,034,677 | 1,780,322 | 1,022,552 | 450,406 |
| Philippines | 1,843,989 | 1,777,588 | 1,369,070 | 912,674 |
| Vietnam | 1,281,010 | 1,240,542 | 988,174 | 543,262 |
| El Salvador | 1,252,067 | 1,214,049 | 817,336 | 465,433 |
| Cuba | 1,144,024 | 1,104,679 | 872,716 | 736,971 |
| South Korea | 1,070,335 | 1,100,422 | 864,125 | 568,397 |
| Dominican Republic | 991,046 | 879,187 | 687,677 | 347,858 |
| Guatemala | 902,293 | 830,824 | 480,665 | 225,739 |
| All of Latin America |  | 21,224,087 | 16,086,974 | 8,407,837 |
| All Immigrants | 41,347,945 | 39,955,854 | 31,107,889 | 19,767,316 |

Source: 1990 and 2000 decennial Census and 2010 American Community Survey

**Economic**

Mexican immigrants march for more rights in Northern California's largest city, [San Jose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Jose%2C_California) (2006).

In a late 1980s study, economists overwhelmingly viewed immigration, including illegal immigration, as a positive for the economy. According to James Smith, a senior economist at Santa Monica-based [RAND Corporation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAND_Corporation) and lead author of the [United States National Research Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_National_Research_Council)'s study *"*[*The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_Americans%3A_Economic%2C_Demographic%2C_and_Fiscal_Effects_of_Immigration)*"*, immigrants contribute as much as $10 billion to the [U.S. economy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._economy) each year. The NRC report found that although immigrants, especially those from Latin America, caused a net loss in terms of taxes paid versus social services received, immigration can provide an overall gain to the domestic economy due to an increase in pay for higher-skilled workers, lower prices for goods and services produced by immigrant labor, and more efficiency and lower wages for some owners of capital. The report also notes that although immigrant workers compete with [domestic workers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_worker) for low-skilled jobs, some immigrants specialize in activities that otherwise would not exist in an area, and thus can be beneficial for all domestic residents. A non-partisan report in 2007 from the [Congressional Budget Office](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congressional_Budget_Office) concluded that most estimates show that illegal immigrants impose a net cost to state and local governments, but "that no agreement exists as to the size of, or even the best way of measuring, the cost on a national level." Estimates of the net national cost that illegal immigrants impose on the United States vary greatly, with the [Urban Institute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_Institute) saying it was $1.9 billion in 1992, and a [Rice University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rice_University) professor putting it at $19.3 billion in 1993. About twenty-one million immigrants, or about fifteen percent of the labor force, hold jobs in the United States; however, the number of unemployed is only seven million, meaning that immigrant workers are not taking jobs from domestic workers, but rather are doing jobs that would not have existed had the immigrant workers not been in the United States. U.S. Census Bureau's *Survey of Business Owners: Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002* indicated that the number of Hispanic-owned businesses in the United States grew to nearly 1.6 million in 2002. Those businesses generated about $222 billion in gross revenue. The report notes that the burden of poor immigrants is not borne equally among states, and is most heavy in California. Another claim supporting expanding immigration levels is that immigrants mostly do jobs Americans do not want. A 2006 [Pew Hispanic Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pew_Hispanic_Center) report added evidence to support this claim, when they found that increasing immigration levels have not hurt employment prospects for American workers. Research shows an economic consensus that, taken as a whole, immigrants raise living standards for American workers by boosting demand and increasing productivity, contributing to innovation, and lowering prices.

Garment factories in [Manhattan's Chinatown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinatown%2C_Manhattan). Most garments are now made in China, not locally.

In 2009, a study by the [Cato Institute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cato_Institute), a [free market](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_market) [think tank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank), found that legalization of low-skilled illegal resident workers in the US would result in a net increase in US GDP of $180 billion over ten years. The Cato Institute study did not examine the impact on per capita income for most Americans. Jason Riley notes that because of progressive income taxation, in which the top 1% of earners pay 37% of federal income taxes (even though they actually pay a lower tax percentage based on their income), 60% of Americans collect more in government services than they pay in, which also reflects on immigrants. In any event, the typical immigrant and his children will pay a net $80,000 more in their lifetime than they collect in government services according to the NAS. Legal immigration policy is set to maximize net taxation. Illegal immigrants even after an amnesty tend to be recipients of more services than they pay in taxes. In 2010, an [econometrics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Econometrics) study by a [Rutgers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rutgers_University) [economist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economist) found that immigration helped increase bilateral trade when the incoming people were connected via networks to their country of origin, particularly boosting trade of [final goods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Final_goods) as opposed to [intermediate goods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate_goods), but that the trade benefit weakened when the immigrants became assimilated into American culture.

The Kauffman Foundation's index of entrepreneurial activity is nearly 40% higher for immigrants than for natives. Immigrants were involved in the founding of many prominent American high-tech companies, such as Google, Yahoo, YouTube, Sun Microsystems, and eBay. On the poor end of the spectrum, the "New Americans" report found that low-wage immigration does not, on aggregate, lower the wages of most domestic workers. The report also addresses the question of if immigration affects black Americans differently from the population in general: "While some have suspected that blacks suffer disproportionately from the inflow of low-skilled immigrants, none of the available evidence suggests that they have been particularly hard-hit on a national level. Some have lost their jobs, especially in places where immigrants are concentrated. But the majority of blacks live elsewhere, and their economic fortunes are tied to other factors."

Scottish immigrant [Andrew Carnegie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Carnegie) led the enormous expansion of the American [steel industry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steel_industry) in the late 19th century.

A study done in 2005 showed that a third of adult immigrants had not finished [high school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secondary_education_in_the_United_States), and a third had no [health insurance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_insurance_in_the_United_States). Robert Samuelson points out that poor immigrants strain public services such as local schools and health care. He points out that "from 2000 to 2006, 41 percent of the increase in people without health insurance occurred among Hispanics." According to the immigration reduction advocacy group [Center for Immigration Studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Center_for_Immigration_Studies), 25.8% of Mexican immigrants live in poverty, which is more than double the rate for natives in 1999. In another report, [The Heritage Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Heritage_Foundation) notes that from 1990 to 2006, the number of poor Hispanics increased by 3.2 million, from 6 million to 9.2 million.

[Bangladeshi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi_American) immigrant [Fazlur Rahman Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fazlur_Rahman_Khan) was responsible for the engineering design of [Sears Tower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sears_Tower) (now Willis Tower), the tallest building in the world until 1998.

U.S. citizens will not take certain jobs usually done by foreign workers, like manual labor involving agriculture. Fruit picking labor costs are estimated at $0.36 per pound, so a production rate of 1 pound per minute is required to earn minimum wage after fees are deducted. Hard physical labor and dangerous jobs with a small paycheck create labor shortages in certain job markets that can only be satisfied using foreign labor. Foreign laborers often work for no pay for several months each year to earn enough to pay their employer for the cost of their [H series visa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H-1B_visa). Hispanic immigrants in the United States were hit hard by the [subprime mortgage crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subprime_mortgage_crisis). There was a disproportionate level of foreclosures in some immigrant neighborhoods. The banking industry provided home loans to [undocumented immigrants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigration_to_the_United_States), viewing it as an untapped resource for growing their own revenue stream. In October 2008, [KFYI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KFYI) reported that according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, five million illegal immigrants held fraudulent home mortgages. The story was later pulled from their website and replaced with a correction. The [Phoenix Business Journal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix_Business_Journal) cited a HUD spokesman saying that there was no basis to news reports that more than five million bad mortgages were held by illegal immigrants, and that the agency had no data showing the number of illegal immigrants holding foreclosed or bad mortgages.

Immigration and foreign labor documentation fees increased over 80% in 2007, with over 90% of funding for USCIS derived from immigration application fees, creating many USCIS jobs involving immigration to US, such as immigration interview officials, finger print processor, Department of Homeland Security, etc. An article by [American Enterprise Institute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Enterprise_Institute) researcher [Jason Richwine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason_Richwine) states that while earlier European immigrants were often poor when they arrived, by the third generation they had economically assimilated to be indistinguishable from the general population. However, for the Hispanic immigrants the process stalls at the second generation and the third generation continues to be substantially poorer than whites. Despite apparent disparities between different communities, Asians, a significant number of whom arrived in the United States after 1965, had the highest median income per household among all race groups as of 2008.

According to NPR in 2005, about 3% of illegal immigrants were working in [agriculture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture_in_the_United_States). The [H-2A visa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H-2A_visa) allows U.S. employers to bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill [temporary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guest_worker_program) agricultural jobs. The passing of tough immigration laws in several states from around 2009 provides a number of practical case studies. The state of Georgia passed immigration law HB 87 in 2011 this led, according to the coalition of top Kansas businesses, to 50% of its agricultural produce being left to rot in the fields, at a cost to the state of more than $400m. Overall losses caused by the act were $1bn; it was estimated that the figure would become over $20bn if all the estimated 325,000 undocumented workers left Georgia. The cost to Alabama of its crackdown in June 2011 has been estimated at almost $11bn, with up to 80,000 unauthorized immigrant workers leaving the state.

While immigration from Latin America has kept the United States from falling off a Japanese or European style demographic cliff, this is a limited resource as fertility rates continue to decline throughout the Americas and the world.

According to [Congressional Research Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congressional_Research_Service), since the 1970s while immigration to the United States increased, the lower 90% of tax filers incomes became stagnant, and eventually began to decrease since 2000.

**Social**

Irish immigration was opposed in the 1850s by the [nativist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativism_%28politics%29) [Know Nothing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_Nothing) movement, originating in New York in 1843. It was engendered by popular fears that the country was being overwhelmed by [Irish Catholic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Catholic) immigrants. In 1891, a lynch mob stormed a local jail and hanged several [Italians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italians) following the acquittal of several Sicilian immigrants alleged to be involved in the murder of [New Orleans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Orleans) police chief [David Hennessy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hennessy). The Congress passed the Emergency Quota Act in 1921, followed by the Immigration Act of 1924. The Immigration Act of 1924 was aimed at limiting immigration overall, and making sure that the nationalities of new arrivals matched the overall national profile.

After the September 11 attacks, many Americans entertained doubts and suspicions about people apparently of Middle-Eastern origins. [NPR](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NPR) in 2010 fired a prominent black commentator, [Juan Williams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Williams), when he talked publicly about his fears on seeing people dressed like Muslims on airplanes.

Racist thinking among and between minority groups does occur; examples of this are conflicts between blacks and [Korean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_American) immigrants, notably in the [1992 Los Angeles Riots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Los_Angeles_Riots), and between [African Americans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Americans) and non-white [Latino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latino) immigrants. There has been a long running racial tension between African American and Mexican [prison gangs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_gangs), as well as significant riots in California prisons where they have targeted each other, for ethnic reasons. There have been reports of racially motivated attacks against African Americans who have moved into neighborhoods occupied mostly by people of Mexican origin, and vice versa. There has also been an increase in violence between non-Hispanic Anglo Americans and Latino immigrants, and between [African](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africans_in_the_United_States) immigrants and African Americans.

A 2007 study on assimilation found that Mexican immigrants are less fluent in English than both non-Mexican Hispanic immigrants and other immigrants. While English fluency increases with time stayed in the United States, although further improvements after the first decade are limited, Mexicans never catch up with non-Mexican Hispanics, who never catch up with non-Hispanics. The study also writes that "Even among immigrants who came to the United States before they were ﬁve years old and whose entire schooling was in the United States, those Mexican born have average education levels of 11.7 years, whereas those from other countries have average levels of education of 14.1 years." Unlike other immigrants, Mexicans have a tendency to live in communities with many other Mexicans which decreases incentives for assimilation. Correcting for this removes about half the fluency difference between Mexicans and other immigrants.

**Religious diversity**

Immigration from South Asia and elsewhere has contributed to enlarging the religious composition of the United States. [Islam in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_the_United_States) is growing mainly due to immigration. [Hinduism in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_in_the_United_States), [Buddhism in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_the_United_States), and [Sikhism in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_the_United_States) are other examples.

Since 1992, an estimated 1.7 million Muslims, approximately 1 million Hindus, and approximately 1 million Buddhists have immigrated legally to the United States.

**Political**

*See also:* [*Immigration reform*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_reform) *and* [*Nativism (politics)*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativism_%28politics%29)

Immigrant rights march in downtown [Los Angeles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles), California on May Day, 2006.

A [*Boston Globe*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Boston_Globe) article attributed [Barack Obama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama)'s win in the [2008 U.S. Presidential election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Presidential_election%2C_2008) to a marked reduction over the preceding decades in the percentage of whites in the American electorate, attributing this demographic change to the Immigration Act of 1965. The article quoted [Simon Rosenberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Rosenberg), president and founder of the [New Democrat Network](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Democrat_Network), as having said that the Act is "the most important piece of legislation that no one's ever heard of," and that it "set America on a very different demographic course than the previous 300 years."

Immigrants differ on their political views; however, the [Democratic Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Party_%28United_States%29) is considered to be in a far stronger position among immigrants overall. Research shows that religious affiliation can also significantly impact both their social values and voting patterns of immigrants, as well as the broader American population. Hispanic evangelicals, for example, are more strongly conservative than non-Hispanic evangelicals. This trend is often similar for Hispanics or others strongly identifying with the [Catholic Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church), a religion that strongly opposes abortion and gay marriage.

A rally in [Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago), part of the Great American Boycott and [2006 U.S. immigration reform protests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_United_States_immigration_reform_protests), on May 1, 2006.

The key interests groups that lobby on immigration are religious, ethnic and business groups, together with some liberals and some conservative public policy organizations. Both the pro- and anti- groups affect policy.

Studies have suggested that some [special interest group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_interest_group) lobby for less immigration for their own group and more immigration for other groups since they see effects of immigration, such as increased labor competition, as detrimental when affecting their own group but beneficial when affecting other groups.

A 2007 paper found that both pro- and anti-immigration special interest groups play a role in migration policy. "Barriers to migration are lower in sectors in which business lobbies incur larger lobbying expenditures and higher in sectors where labor unions are more important." A 2011 study examining the voting of US representatives on migration policy suggests that "representatives from more skilled labor abundant districts are more likely to support an open immigration policy towards the unskilled, whereas the opposite is true for representatives from more unskilled labor abundant districts."

After the 2010 election, Gary Segura of Latino Decisions stated that Hispanic voters influenced the outcome and "may have saved the Senate for Democrats". Several ethnic lobbies support immigration reforms that would allow [illegal immigrants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigration_to_the_United_States) that have succeeded in entering to gain citizenship. They may also lobby for special arrangements for their own group. The Chairman for the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform has stated that "the Irish Lobby will push for any special arrangement it can get — 'as will every other ethnic group in the country.’ “The [irredentist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irredentism) and ethnic [separatist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separatist) movements for [Reconquista](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconquista_%28Mexico%29) and [Aztlán](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztl%C3%A1n) see immigration from Mexico as strengthening their cause.

The book *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy* (2009) states that several ethnic special interest groups are involved in pro-immigration lobbying. Ethnic lobbies also influence [foreign policy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_policy). The authors write that "Increasingly, ethnic tensions surface in electoral races, with House, Senate, and gubernatorial contests serving as proxy battlegrounds for antagonistic ethnoracial groups and communities. In addition, ethnic politics affect party politics as well, as groups compete for relative political power within a party". However, the authors argue that currently ethnic interest groups, in general, do not have too much power in foreign policy and can balance other special interest groups.

In a 2012 news story, *Reuters* reported, "Strong support from Hispanics, the fastest-growing demographic in the United States, helped tip President Barack Obama's fortunes as he secured a [second term in the White House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election%2C_2012), according to Election Day polling."

Lately, there is talk among several Republican leaders, such as governors [Bobby Jindal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bobby_Jindal) and [Susana Martinez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susana_Martinez), of taking a new, friendlier approach to immigration. Former US Secretary of Commerce [Carlos Gutierrez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Gutierrez) is promoting the creation of [Republicans for Immigration Reform](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republicans_for_Immigration_Reform).

**Health**

The issue of the health of immigrants and the associated cost to the public has been largely discussed. The non-emergency use of emergency rooms ostensibly indicates an incapacity to pay, yet some studies allege disproportionately lower access to unpaid health care by immigrants. For this and other reasons, there have been various disputes about how much immigration is costing the United States public health system. [University of Maryland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Maryland%2C_College_Park) economist and Cato Institute scholar [Julian Lincoln Simon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Lincoln_Simon) concluded in 1995 that while immigrants probably pay more into the health system than they take out, this is not the case for elderly immigrants and refugees, who are more dependent on public services for survival.

Immigration from areas of high incidences of disease is thought to have fueled the resurgence of [tuberculosis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuberculosis) (TB), [chagas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chagas_disease), and [hepatitis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hepatitis) in areas of low incidence. According to [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centers_for_Disease_Control_and_Prevention) (CDC), TB cases among foreign-born individuals remain disproportionately high, at nearly nine times the rate of U.S.-born persons. To reduce the risk of [diseases](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infectious_diseases#Mortality_from_infectious_diseases) in low-incidence areas, the main countermeasure has been the screening of immigrants on arrival. [HIV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV)/[AIDS](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS) entered the United States in around 1969, likely through a single infected immigrant from Haiti. Conversely, many new HIV infections in Mexico can be traced back to the United States. People infected with HIV were banned from entering the United States in 1987 by executive order, but the 1993 statute supporting the ban was lifted in 2009. The executive branch is expected to administratively remove HIV from the list of infectious diseases barring immigration, but immigrants generally would need to show that they would not be a burden on public welfare. Researchers have also found what is known as the "healthy immigrant effect", in which immigrants in general tend to be healthier than individuals born in the U.S.

**Crime**

Empirical studies on links between immigration and crime are mixed.

Some writers have suggested that immigrants are under-represented in criminal statistics. In his 1999 book *Crime and Immigrant Youth*, sociologist Tony Waters argued that immigrants themselves are less likely to be arrested and incarcerated; he also argued, however, that the children of some immigrant groups are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated. This is a by-product of the strains that emerge between immigrant parents living in [poor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_in_the_United_States), [inner city](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inner_city) neighborhoods. This occurs particularly in immigrant groups with many children as they begin to form particularly strong peer sub-cultures. A 1999 paper by John Hagan and Alberto Palloni estimated that the involvement in crime by Hispanic immigrants is less than that of other citizens. A 2006 Op-Ed in [*The New York Times*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_York_Times) by [Harvard University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_University) Professor in Sociology Robert J. Sampson says that immigration of Hispanics may in fact be associated with decreased crime.

A 2006 article by [Migration Policy Institute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Migration_Policy_Institute) cited data from the 2000 US Census as evidence for that foreign-born men had lower incarceration rates than native-born men.

According to a 2007 report by the [Immigration Policy Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Policy_Center), [the American Immigration Law Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_American_Immigration_Law_Foundation&action=edit&redlink=1), citing data from the 2000 US Census, native-born American men between 18–39 are five times more likely to be incarcerated than immigrants in the same demographic.

A 2008 study by the [Public Policy Institute of California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Policy_Institute_of_California), found that, "...on average, between 2000 and 2005, cities that had a higher share of recent immigrants (those arriving between 2000 and 2005) saw their crime rates fall further than cities with a lower share" but adds, "As with most studies, we do not have ideal data. This lack of data restricts the questions we will be able to answer. In particular, we cannot focus on the undocumented population explicitly". In a study released by the same Institute, immigrants were ten times less likely to be incarcerated than native born Americans.

Locator map of countries and states with substantial presence of the criminal gang [Mara Salvatrucha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mara_Salvatrucha) – darkness indicates strength.

Explanations for the lower incarceration rates of immigrants include:

* Legal immigrants are screened for criminality prior to entry.
* Legal and illegal immigrants who commit serious crimes are being deported and therefore are unable to commit more crimes (unlike their US counterparts who remain in the US). They are unlikely to become "career criminals" moving in and out of the prison system. In the last 10 years, 816,000 criminal aliens have been removed from the United States. This does not include immigrants whose only offense was living or working illegally in the United States.
* Immigrants understand the severe consequences of being arrested given their legal status (i.e. threat of deportation).

Heather MacDonald at the [Manhattan Institute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manhattan_Institute) in a 2004 article argued that [sanctuary policies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary_city) has caused large problems with crime by illegal aliens since the police cannot report them for deportation before a felony or a series of misdemeanors takes place. In Los Angeles, 95 percent of all outstanding warrants for homicide are for illegal aliens. Up to two-thirds of all fugitive felony warrants (17,000) are for illegal aliens. 60 percent of the 20,000-strong 18th Street Gang in southern California were illegal aliens in a 1995 report.

The [Center for Immigration Studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Center_for_Immigration_Studies) in a 2009 report argued that "New government data indicate that immigrants have high rates of criminality, while older academic research found low rates. The overall picture of immigrants and crime remains confused due to a lack of good data and contrary information." It also criticized the reports by the Public Policy Institute of California and Immigration Policy Center for using data from the 2000 Census according to which 4% of prisoners were immigrants. Non-citizens often have a strong incentive to deny this in order to prevent deportation and there are also other problems. Better methods have found 20–22% immigrants. It also criticized studies looking at percentages of immigrants in a city and crime for only looking at overall crime and not immigrant crime. A 2009 analysis by the Department of Homeland Security found that crime rates were higher in metropolitan areas that received large numbers of legal immigrants, contradicting several older cross-city comparisons.

**Environment**

Some commentators have suggested that increased immigration has a negative effect on the environment, especially as the level of economic development of the United States (and by extension, its energy, water and other needs that underpin its prosperity) means that the impact of a larger population is greater than what would be experienced in other countries.

Perceived heavy immigration, especially in the southwest, has led to some fears about population pressures on the water supply in some areas. California continues to grow by more than a half-million a year and is expected to reach 48 million in 2030. According to the [California Department of Water Resources](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Department_of_Water_Resources), if more supplies are not found by 2020, residents will face a [water shortfall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_crisis) nearly as great as the amount consumed today. Los Angeles is a coastal desert able to support at most one million people on its own water. California is considering using [desalination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desalination) to solve this problem.

**Education**

Scientific laboratories and startup internet opportunities have been a powerful American magnet. By 2000, 23% of scientists with a PhD in the U.S. were immigrants, including 40% of those in engineering and computers. Roughly a third of the United States’ college and universities graduate students in [STEM fields](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/STEM_fields) are foreign nationals – in some states it is well over half of their graduate students. On [Ash Wednesday](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ash_Wednesday), March 5, 2014, the presidents of 28 Catholic and Jesuit colleges and universities, joined the "Fast for Families" movement. The "Fast for Families" movement reignited the immigration debate in the fall of 2013 when the movement's leaders, supported by many members of Congress and the President, fasted for twenty-two days on the [National Mall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Mall) in Washington, D.C.

A study on public schools in California found that white enrollment declined in response to increases in the number of Spanish-speaking Limited English Proficient and Hispanic students. This [white flight](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_flight) was greater for schools with relatively larger proportions of Spanish-speaking Limited English Proficient.

Among 25 to 44-year-olds, 55% of Hispanic immigrants that arrived after age 13 had not completed high school.

**Effects on African Americans**

Harvard economist [George J. Borjas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_J._Borjas) stated that there is controversy over the "huge redistribution [of wealth] away from [unskilled U.S. Citizen] workers to [American employers] who use illegal immigrants." He suggested that immigration had detrimental effects on [African-American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American) employment in terms of lower wages and the number of persons employed. He also reported that a 10% increase in the supply of workers reduced the black wage of that group by 2.5%, lowered the employment rate by 5.9% and increased the black incarceration rate by 1.3%.

**Public opinion**

The ambivalent feeling of Americans toward immigrants is shown by a positive attitude toward groups that have been visible for a century or more, and much more negative attitude toward recent arrivals. For example, a 1982 national poll by the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut showed respondents a card listing a number of groups and asked, "Thinking both of what they have contributed to this country and have gotten from this country, for each one tell me whether you think, on balance, they've been a good or a bad thing for this country," which produced the results shown in the table. "By high margins, Americans are telling pollsters it was a very good thing that Poles, Italians, and Jews emigrated to America. Once again, it's the newcomers who are viewed with suspicion. This time, it's the Mexicans, the Filipinos, and the people from the Caribbean who make Americans nervous."

In a 2002 study, which took place soon after the September 11 attacks, 55% of Americans favored decreasing legal immigration, 27% favored keeping it at the same level, and 15% favored increasing it.

In 2006, the immigration-reduction advocacy think tank the Center for Immigration Studies released a poll that found that 68% of Americans think U.S. immigration levels are too high, and just 2% said they are too low. They also found that 70% said they are less likely to vote for candidates that favor increasing legal immigration. In 2004, 55% of Americans believed legal immigration should remain at the current level or increased and 41% said it should be decreased. The less contact a native-born American has with immigrants, the more likely one would have a negative view of immigrants.

One of the most important factors regarding public opinion about immigration is the level of [unemployment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_by_unemployment_rate); anti-immigrant sentiment is where unemployment is highest, and vice versa.

Surveys indicate that the U.S. public consistently makes a sharp distinction between legal and illegal immigrants, and generally views those perceived as "playing by the rules" with more sympathy than immigrants that have entered the country illegally.

**Legal issues**

**Laws concerning immigration and naturalization**

A U.S. [green card](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permanent_residence_%28United_States%29), a document confirming permanent resident status for eligible immigrants, including refugees, political asylum seekers, family-sponsored migrants, employment-based workers and diversity immigrants (DV).

*See also:* [*Illegal immigration to the United States*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigration_to_the_United_States) *and* [*Guest Worker Program*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guest_Worker_Program)

Laws concerning immigration and naturalization include:

* the 1990 Immigration Act (IMMACT), which limits the annual number of immigrants to 700,000. It emphasizes that family reunification is the main immigration criterion, in addition to employment-related immigration.
* the [Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antiterrorism_and_Effective_Death_Penalty_Act_of_1996) (AEDPA)
* the [Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_Immigration_Reform_and_Immigrant_Responsibility_Act) (IIRIRA)

AEDPA and IIRARA exemplify many categories of criminal activity for which immigrants, including [green card](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Permanent_Resident_Card) holders, can be deported and have imposed [mandatory detention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandatory_detention) for certain types of cases.

**Asylum for refugees**

Main article: [Asylum in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asylum_in_the_United_States)

The U.S. offered to resettle 60,000 [Bhutanese refugees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhutanese_refugees) of ethnic Nepalese descent.

In contrast to economic migrants, who generally do not gain legal admission, refugees, as defined by international law, can gain legal status through a process of seeking and receiving [asylum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_of_asylum), either by being designated a refugee while abroad, or by physically entering the United States and requesting asylum status thereafter. A specified number of [legally defined](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refugee_law) refugees, who either apply for asylum overseas or after arriving in the U.S., are admitted annually. Refugees compose about one-tenth of the total annual immigration to the United States, though some large refugee populations are very prominent. In the year 2014, the number of asylum seekers accepted into the U.S. was about 120,000. This compared with about 31,000 in the UK and 13,500 in Canada. Japan accepted just 41 refugees for resettlement in 2007.

Since 1975, more than 1.3 million refugees from [Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia) have been resettled in the United States. Since 2000 the main refugee-sending regions have been Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, and Ethiopia. The ceiling for refugee resettlement for fiscal year 2008 was 80,000 refugees. The United States expected to admit a minimum of 17,000 Iraqi refugees during fiscal year 2009. The U.S. has resettled more than 42,000 [Bhutanese refugees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhutanese_refugees) from Nepal since 2008.

In fiscal year 2008, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) appropriated over $655 million for long-term services provided to refugees after their arrival in the US. The Obama administration has kept to about the same level.

**Miscellaneous documented immigration**

In [removal proceedings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Removal_proceedings) in front of an [immigration judge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_judge), [cancellation of removal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancellation_of_removal) is a form of relief that is available for certain long-time residents of the United States. It allows a person being faced with the threat of removal to obtain permanent residence if that person has been physically present in the U.S. for at least ten years, has had good moral character during that period, has not been convicted of certain crimes, and can show that removal would result in exceptional and extremely unusual hardship to his or her U.S. citizen or permanent resident spouse, children, or parent. This form of relief is only available when a person is served with a Notice to Appear to appear in the proceedings in the court.

Members of Congress may submit [private bills](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_bill) granting residency to specific named individuals. A special committeevets the requests, which require extensive documentation. The [Central Intelligence Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Intelligence_Agency) has the statutory authority to admit up to one hundred people a year outside of normal immigration procedures, and to provide for their settlement and support. The program is called "PL110", named after the legislation that created the agency, [Public Law 110](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Public_Law_110&action=edit&redlink=1), the [Central Intelligence Agency Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Intelligence_Agency_Act).

**Illegal immigration**

Main article: [Illegal immigration to the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigration_to_the_United_States)

*See also:* [*2006 U.S. immigration reform protests*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_U.S._immigration_reform_protests)*,* [*H.R. 4437*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H.R._4437) *and* [*Illegal immigrant population of the United States*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigrant_population_of_the_United_States)

The [Illegal immigrant population of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigrant_population_of_the_United_States) is estimated to be between 7 and 20 million. The majority of the illegal immigrants are from Mexico.

In a 2011 news story, *Los Angeles Times* reported, "The annual report, relied upon by both sides in the contentious immigration debate, found 11.2 million illegal immigrants living in the U.S., statistically identical to the 11.1 million estimated in 2009. ... The report also found that illegal immigrants in 2010 were parents of 5.5 million children, 4.5 million of whom were [born in the U.S.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anchor_baby) and are citizens. Because illegal immigrants are younger and more likely to be married, they represented a disproportionate share of births — 8% of the babies born in the U.S. between March 2009 and March 2010 were to at least one illegal immigrant parent."

In June 2012, President Obama issued a memorandum instructing officers of the federal government to [defer deporting young illegal immigrants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deferred_Action_for_Childhood_Arrivals) who had been brought to the U.S. as children. Obama's new non-deportation policy allows 1.7 million illegal immigrants to apply for the temporary right to live and work in the United States. The memorandum is the move by the Obama administration to use its [executive powers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_powers_under_the_United_States_Constitution) to revise immigration procedures without changing the law. Beginning March 4, 2013, illegal immigrants who can show that time apart from a U.S. spouse, child or parent would create "extreme hardship" can apply for legal visas without leaving the U.S

On November 25, 2013, Ju Hong, a 24-year-old South Korean immigrant without legal documentation, shouted at Obama to use his executive power to stop deportation of illegal immigrants. Obama said "If, in fact, I could solve all these problems without passing laws in Congress, then I would do so." "But we're also a nation of laws, that's part of our tradition," he continued. "And so the easy way out is to try to yell and pretend like I can do something by violating our laws. And what I'm proposing is the harder path, which is to use our democratic processes to achieve the same goal."

On November 20, 2014, President Obama announced a set of [executive actions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_reform#President_Barack_Obama.27s_Executive_Actions_of_November.2C_2014) which could allow up to an estimated 45% of undocumented immigrants to legally stay and work in the United States. Although not without precedent under prior presidents, these actions do amount to at least a change in tactics on the part of the Obama administration. In his announcement, the president said he still hoped for "a more permanent legislative solution" that would make his [actions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_reform#President_Barack_Obama.27s_Executive_Actions_of_November.2C_2014) "no longer necessary."

**Military immigration**

On November 15, 2013 the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services announced that they would be issuing a new policy memorandum called "parole in place. " Parole in place would offer green cards to immigrant parents, spouses and children of active military duty personnel. Prior to this law relatives of military personnel-excluding husbands and wives- were forced to leave the United States and apply for green cards in their home countries. The law allows for family members to avoid the possible ten-year bar from the United States and remain in the United States while applying for lawful permanent residence. The parole status, given in one year terms, will be subject to the family member being "absent a criminal conviction or other serious adverse factors."

**Immigration in popular culture**

A cartoon in [*Puck*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puck_%28magazine%29) from 1888 attacked businessmen for welcoming large numbers of low paid immigrants, leaving the American men unemployed.

The history of immigration to the United States is the history of the country itself, and the journey from beyond the sea is an element found in [American folklore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_folklore), appearing over and over again in everything from [*The Godfather*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Godfather) to [*Gangs of New York*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangs_of_New_York) to "[The Song of Myself](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_of_Myself)" to [Neil Diamond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Diamond)'s "America" to the animated feature [*An American Tail*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_American_Tail).

From the 1880s to the 1910s, vaudeville dominated the popular image of immigrants, with very popular caricature portrayals of ethnic groups. The specific features of these caricatures became widely accepted as accurate portrayals.

In *The Melting Pot* (1908), playwright [Israel Zangwill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Zangwill) (1864–1926) explored issues that dominated [Progressive Era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Era) debates about immigration policies. Zangwill's theme of the positive benefits of the American [melting pot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melting_pot) resonated widely in popular culture and literary and academic circles in the 20th century; his cultural symbolism – in which he situated immigration issues – likewise informed American cultural imagining of immigrants for decades, as exemplified by Hollywood films. The popular culture's image of ethnic celebrities often includes stereotypes about immigrant groups. For example, Frank Sinatra's public image as a superstar contained important elements of the [*American Dream*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Dream) while simultaneously incorporating stereotypes about Italian Americans that were based in nativist and Progressive responses to immigration.

The process of assimilation has been a common theme of popular culture. For example, "lace-curtain Irish" refers to middle-class [Irish Americans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Americans) desiring assimilation into mainstream society in counterpoint to the older, more raffish "shanty Irish". The occasional malapropisms and left-footed social blunders of these upward mobiles were gleefully lampooned in vaudeville, popular song, and the comic strips of the day such as [*Bringing Up Father*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bringing_Up_Father), starring Maggie and Jiggs, which ran in daily newspapers for 87 years (1913 to 2000). In [*The Departed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Departed) (2006), Staff Sergeant Dignam regularly points out the dichotomy between the lace curtain Irish lifestyle Billy Costigan enjoyed with his mother, and the shanty Irish lifestyle of Costigan's father. In recent years the popular culture has paid special attention to Mexican immigration and the film [*Spanglish*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanglish_%28film%29) (2004) tells of a friendship of a Mexican housemaid ([Paz Vega](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paz_Vega)) and her boss played by [Adam Sandler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Sandler).

**Immigration in literature**

Maggie and Jiggs from [*Bringing Up Father*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bringing_Up_Father) (January 7, 1940).

Novelists and writers have captured much of the color and challenge in their immigrant lives through their writings.

Regarding Irish women in the 19th century, there were numerous novels and short stories by Harvey O'Higgins, Peter McCorry, Bernard O'Reilly and [Sarah Orne Jewett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Orne_Jewett) that emphasize emancipation from Old World controls, new opportunities and expansiveness of the immigrant experience.

On the other hand, Hladnik studies three popular novels of the late 19th century that warned Slovenes not to immigrate to the dangerous new world of the United States.

Jewish American writer [Anzia Yezierska](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anzia_Yezierska) wrote her novel *Bread Givers* (1925) to explore such themes as Russian-Jewish immigration in the early 20th century, the tension between Old and New World Yiddish culture, and women's experience of immigration. A well-established author Yezierska focused on the Jewish struggle to escape the ghetto and enter middle- and upper-class America. In the novel, the heroine, Sara Smolinsky, escape from New York City's "down-town ghetto" by breaking tradition. She quits her job at the family store and soon becomes engaged to a rich real-estate magnate. She graduates college and takes a high-prestige job teaching public school. Finally Sara restores her broken links to family and religion.

The Swedish author [Vilhelm Moberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vilhelm_Moberg) in the mid-20th century wrote a series of four novels describing one Swedish family's migration from Småland to Minnesota in the late 19th century, a destiny shared by almost one million people. The author emphasizes the authenticity of the experiences as depicted (although he did change names). These novels have been translated into English ([*The Emigrants*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emigrants_%28Swedish_novel%29), 1951, [*Unto a Good Land*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unto_a_Good_Land), 1954, [*The Settlers*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Settlers_%28novel%29), 1961, [*The Last Letter Home*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Letter_Home), 1961). The musical [Kristina från Duvemåla](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristina_fr%C3%A5n_Duvem%C3%A5la) by ex-[ABBA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ABBA) members Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson is based on this story.

[*The Immigrant*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Immigrant_%28musical%29) is a musical by [Steven Alper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Alper), [Sarah Knapp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Knapp), and [Mark Harelik](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Harelik). The show is based on the story of Harelik's grandparents, Matleh and Haskell Harelik, who traveled to [Galveston, Texas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galveston%2C_Texas) in 1909.

**Documentary films**

[Play media](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/09/Immigrant_to_America.ogv)

Film about historical immigration to America from ca. 1970

In their documentary [*How Democracy Works Now: Twelve Stories*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_Democracy_Works_Now%3A_Twelve_Stories), filmmakers [Shari Robertson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shari_Robertson) and [Michael Camerini](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Camerini) examine the American political system through the lens of [immigration reform](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_reform) from 2001 to 2007. Since the debut of the first five films, the series has become an important resource for advocates, policy-makers and educators.

That film series premiered nearly a decade after the filmmakers' landmark documentary film [*Well-Founded Fear*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well-Founded_Fear) which provided a behind-the-scenes look at the [process for seeking asylum in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asylum_in_the_United_States). That film still marks the only time that a film-crew was privy to the private proceedings at the [U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_and_Naturalization_Service) (INS), where individual asylum officers ponder the often life-or-death fate of immigrants seeking asylum.

**Legal perspectives**

University of North Carolina law professor Hiroshi Motomura has identified three approaches the United States has taken to the legal status of immigrants in his book *Americans in Waiting: The Lost Story of Immigration and Citizenship in the United States*. The first, dominant in the 19th century, treated immigrants as in transition; in other words, as prospective citizens. As soon as people declared their intention to become citizens, they received multiple low-cost benefits, including the eligibility for free homesteads in the [Homestead Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homestead_Act) of 1869, and in many states, the right to vote. The goal was to make the country more attractive, so large numbers of farmers and skilled craftsmen would settle new lands. By the 1880s, a second approach took over, treating newcomers as "immigrants by contract". An implicit deal existed where immigrants who were literate and could earn their own living were permitted in restricted numbers. Once in the United States, they would have limited legal rights, but were not allowed to vote until they became citizens, and would not be eligible for the New Deal government benefits available in the 1930s. The third and more recent policyis "immigration by affiliation", which Motomura argues is the treatment which depends on how deeply rooted people have become in the country. An immigrant who applies for citizenship as soon as permitted, has a long history of working in the United States, and has significant family ties, is more deeply affiliated and can expect better treatment.

It has been suggested that the US should adopt policies similar to those in Canada and Australia and select for desired qualities such as education and work experience. Another suggestion is to reduce legal immigration because of being a relative, except for nuclear family members, since such immigrations of extended relatives, who in turn bring in their own extended relatives, may cause a perpetual cycle of "chain immigration".

**Interpretive perspectives**

The [Statue of Liberty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Liberty) was a common sight to many immigrants who entered the United States through [Ellis Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellis_Island)

The [American Dream](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Dream) is the belief that through hard work and determination, any United States immigrant can achieve a better life, usually in terms of financial prosperity and enhanced personal freedom of choice. According to historians, the rapid economic and industrial expansion of the U.S. is not simply a function of being a resource rich, hardworking, and inventive country, but the belief that anybody could get a share of the country's wealth if he or she was willing to work hard. This dream has been a major factor in attracting immigrants to the United States.

**See also**

* [Demographics of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_States)
* [Emigration from the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emigration_from_the_United_States)
* [European colonization of the Americas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_colonization_of_the_Americas)
* [History of laws concerning immigration and naturalization in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_laws_concerning_immigration_and_naturalization_in_the_United_States)
* [*How Democracy Works Now: Twelve Stories*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_Democracy_Works_Now%3A_Twelve_Stories)
* [Illegal immigration to the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_immigration_to_the_United_States)
* [Inequality within immigrant families (United States)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inequality_within_immigrant_families_%28United_States%29)
* [Nativism (politics)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativism_%28politics%29), opposition to immigration
* [Opposition to immigration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opposition_to_immigration)
* [United States immigration statistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_immigration_statistics)

This page was last modified on 16 October 2015, at 22:27.