

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS: FACTS AND FIGURES

Urban Institute Immigration Studies Program
Jeffrey S. Passel, Randy Capps, and Michael Fix
January 12, 2004

The Bush administration and members of Congress have proposed granting temporary legal status to undocumented immigrant workers currently residing in the United States. Below are some basic descriptive data on the undocumented population, particularly from “A Profile of the Low-Wage Immigrant Workforce” and “The Dispersal of Immigrants in the 1990s”:

NUMBERS, ORIGINS, AND DESTINATIONS

- **Total number:** Our best estimate, based on the March 2002 Current Population Survey and other data sources, is that there are 9.3 million undocumented immigrants in the country.¹ They represent 26 percent of the total foreign-born population [figure 1].
- **Countries of origin:** Mexicans make up over half of undocumented immigrants—57 percent of the total, or about 5.3 million. Another 2.2 million (23 percent) are from other Latin American countries. About 10 percent are from Asia, 5 percent from Europe and Canada, and 5 percent from the rest of the world.
- **Distribution by state:** Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of the undocumented population lives in just six states: California (27 percent), Texas (13 percent), New York (8 percent), Florida (7 percent), Illinois (6 percent), and New Jersey (4 percent) [table 1]. But, the most rapid growth in the undocumented population since the mid-1990s has been outside these states.
- **States where the undocumented represent high shares of the immigrant population:** The undocumented make up more than 40 percent of the foreign-born population in 10 states—most of which saw their foreign-born populations grow rapidly during the 1990s. High-growth regions are the Rocky Mountains, the Midwest, and the Southeast. The undocumented populations of Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina have grown so rapidly that they may already have surpassed New Jersey’s [figure 2].

LABOR FORCE

- **Number of undocumented persons in the labor force:** About 6 million undocumented are working—representing about 5 percent of U.S. workers. This group is potentially eligible for temporary legal status under the Bush administration’s plan.
- **Labor force participation of undocumented immigrants:** Virtually all undocumented men are in the labor force. Their labor-force participation rate (96 percent) exceeds that of men who are legal immigrants or who are U.S. citizens because undocumented men are younger and less likely to be disabled, retired, or in school.

¹ See “Note on Methods and Terminology” for definitions, data sources, and methods.

Undocumented women are less likely to be in the labor force (62 percent) than undocumented men or than women who are U.S. citizens. One reason is that proportionately more undocumented women are of childbearing age, and undocumented women are more likely than U.S. citizens to have children and remain in the home.

- ***Low-wage workers:*** Undocumented workers earn considerably less than working U.S. citizens. About two-thirds of undocumented workers earn less than twice the minimum wage, compared with only one-third of all workers. Undocumented workers make up less than 10 percent of the 43 million low-wage workers in the United States.

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

- ***Shares of men and women:*** Contrary to public perception, women make up a substantial share—41 percent—of the adult undocumented population. There are about 4.5 million undocumented men (18 and over) and 3.2 million undocumented women.
- ***Children of undocumented immigrants in the United States:*** About 1.6 million children under 18 in the United States are themselves undocumented immigrants. Another 3 million children with undocumented parents are U.S. citizens because they were born here. Current proposals that would require workers to return to their sending countries after six years would thus affect both undocumented and U.S. citizen children.

The views are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Urban Institute, its board of trustees, or its sponsors.

Note on Methods and Terminology

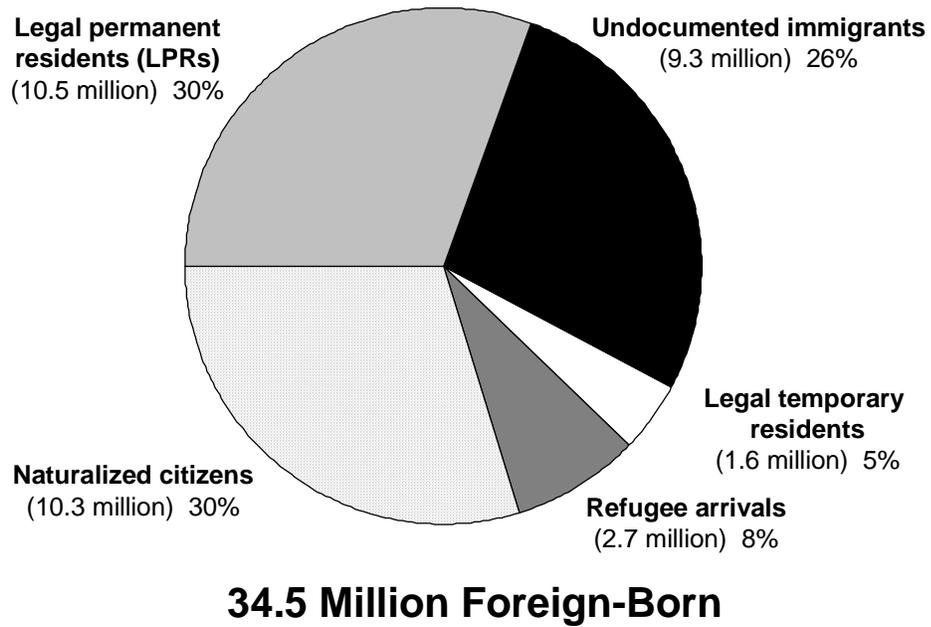
We estimate the number of undocumented immigrants by subtracting *legal* foreign-born residents from the *total* foreign-born population. This total is based on the March 2002 Current Population Survey (CPS) with an allowance for immigrants not included in the CPS. To estimate the number of *legal* residents, we use official data, mostly provided by the Department of Homeland Security and other government agencies, for the following categories: (a) legal permanent residents, i.e., green-card holders including amnesty recipients under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986; (b) refugees, asylees and parolees; and (c) legal temporary residents, which include students, professors, high-tech workers, and a number of other temporary visa holders.

“Undocumented immigrants” are those who do not fall into any of our legal categories. Two groups account for most undocumented immigrants: (a) those who entered the country without valid documents, including people crossing the Southwestern border clandestinely; and (b) those who entered with valid visas but overstayed their visas’ expiration or otherwise violated the terms of their admission. Some undocumented immigrants in our estimate have legal authorization to live and work in the United States. Two such groups—those with temporary protected status (TPS) and asylum applicants—may account for as much as 10 percent of our estimate.

We use the term “undocumented immigrants” but they are also referred to elsewhere as unauthorized migrants, illegal immigrants, illegal aliens, and undocumented aliens.

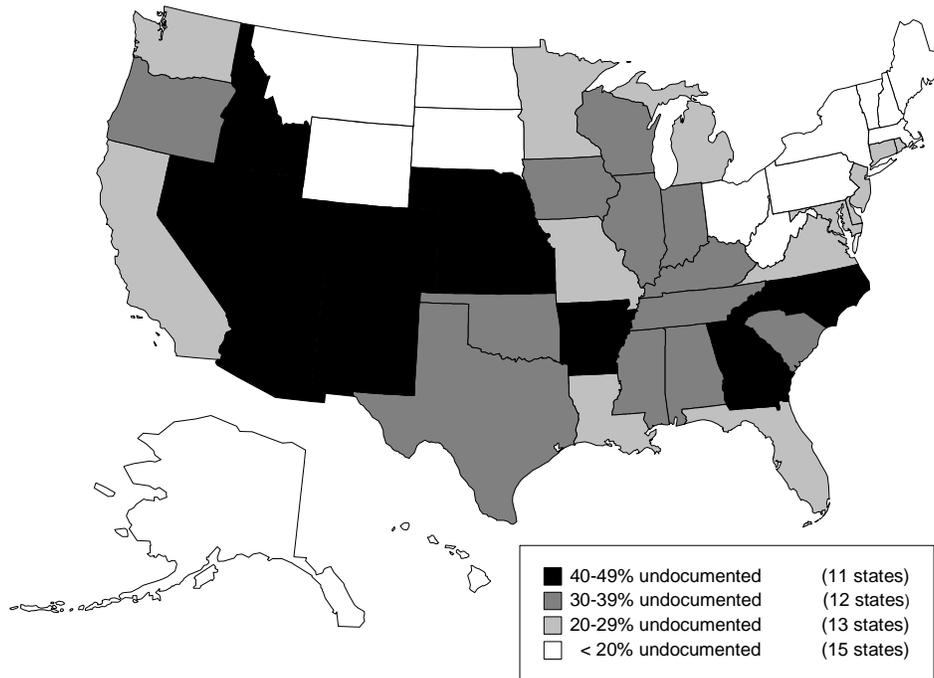
Support for this fact sheet was provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Hitachi Foundation.

FIGURE 1. LEGAL STATUS OF THE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION, 2002



SOURCE: Urban Institute estimates based on March 2002 Current Population Survey.

FIGURE 2. SHARE UNDOCUMENTED OF FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION, BY STATE, 2000



SOURCE: Urban Institute estimates based on Census 2000.

TABLE 1. UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS BY STATE, 2002

U.S. total (in millions)	9.3
California	2.4
Texas	1.1
Florida	0.9
New York	0.7
Illinois	0.4
New Jersey	0.4
All others	3.5
<u>250,000–350,000</u>	<u>50,000–75,000</u>
Arizona	Kansas
Georgia	New Mexico
North Carolina	Ohio
	Oklahoma
<u>175,000–200,000</u>	South Carolina
Colorado	Tennessee
Massachusetts	Wisconsin
Virginia	
Washington	<u>25,000–50,000</u>
	Alabama
<u>120,000–150,000</u>	Arkansas
Maryland	District of Columbia
Michigan	Idaho
Nevada	Iowa
Oregon	Kentucky
	Louisiana
<u>75,000–100,000</u>	Missouri
Connecticut	Nebraska
Indiana	Rhode Island
Minnesota	
Pennsylvania	<u>Under 20,000</u>
Utah	All 12 other states
	(75,000–100,000 total)

SOURCE: Urban Institute estimates based on Census 2000 and March 2002 Current Population Survey.