

ADDING DIVERSITY FROM ABROAD:

The Foreign-Born Population, 2000

About 10 percent of Americans are foreign born — less than the highest share during the last century (15 percent in 1910), but more than the lowest share (5 percent in 1970).

Having all the facts on America's growing cultural diversity is essential for good government and good business. In some parts of the country, the characteristics of the foreign-born population must be taken into account when developing educational programs, designing street signs, and providing social services. However, this population defies generalization, because it is both diverse and rapidly changing.

Changes in the immigration laws from 1965 to 1990 contributed to increased migration from abroad and generated greater diversity among the newcomers. The foreign-born population in the United States grew from 10 million in 1970,¹ the lowest total in the 20th century, to 14 million in 1980, and 20 million in 1990. By March 2000, the estimated foreign-born population in the United States was 28 million, according to the Current Population Survey (CPS).²

¹ The number of people in the United States who were foreign born was 9.6 million in 1970 and 9.7 million in 1960.

² Estimates in this chapter are calculated using sample data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), weighted by population controls based on the 1990 decennial census. The population universe for the March CPS is the civilian noninstitutional population plus armed forces living off base or with their families on post. As a result, these estimates will differ from population estimates computed from either the intercensal estimates program or the 2000 decennial census.

Words That Count

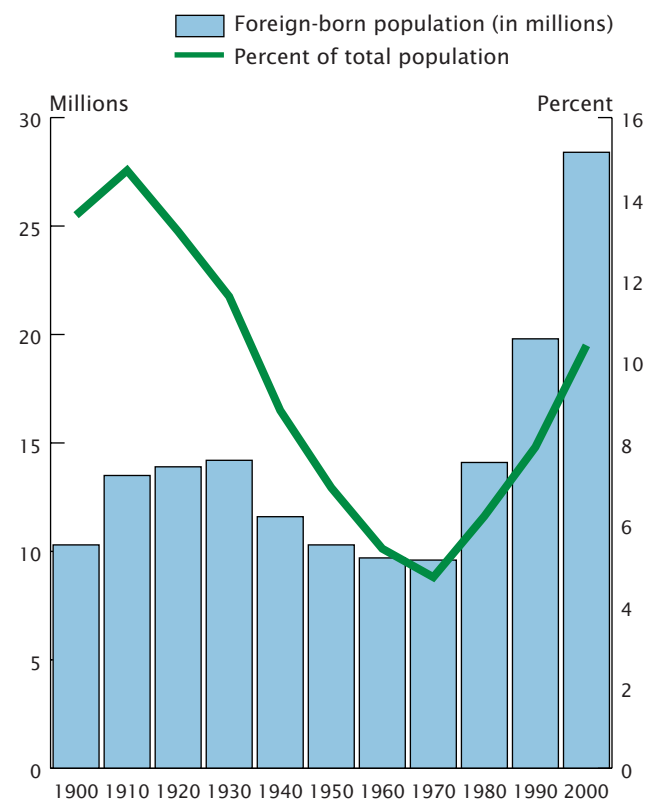
- **The foreign-born population** refers to people who were not U.S. citizens at birth.
- **The native population** refers to people who were either born in the United States or a U.S. Island Area, such as Puerto Rico, or who were born abroad of a U.S. citizen parent.

Since 1970, the composition of the foreign-born population has changed dramatically.

Between 1970 and 2000, the share of foreign-born U.S. residents from Europe dropped from 62 percent to 15 percent. Over the same period, the share of the foreign-born from Asia grew from 9 percent to 25 percent, and the share from Latin America increased from 19 percent to 51 percent. In 2000, two-thirds of foreign-born Latin Americans were from Central America (including Mexico).

Figure 17-1.

The Foreign-Born Population: 1900-2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses, 1900 to 1990 and Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Thirty-nine percent of the foreign-born population entered the United States in 1990 or later and 28 percent in the 1980s. More than one in three foreign-born residents of the United States were naturalized citizens. Among those who entered the country before 1970, 80 percent were naturalized.

Significant differences exist between the foreign-born and native populations, as well as important differences among the major foreign-born population groups.

In 2000, 79 percent of foreign-born residents in the United States were aged 18 to 64, compared with 60 percent of native residents. The foreign-born population was particularly concentrated in the group aged 25 to 44. Although 44 percent of the foreign-born were in this age group, only 29 percent of the native population were. Relatively few of the foreign-born were less than 18 years old — 10 percent, compared with

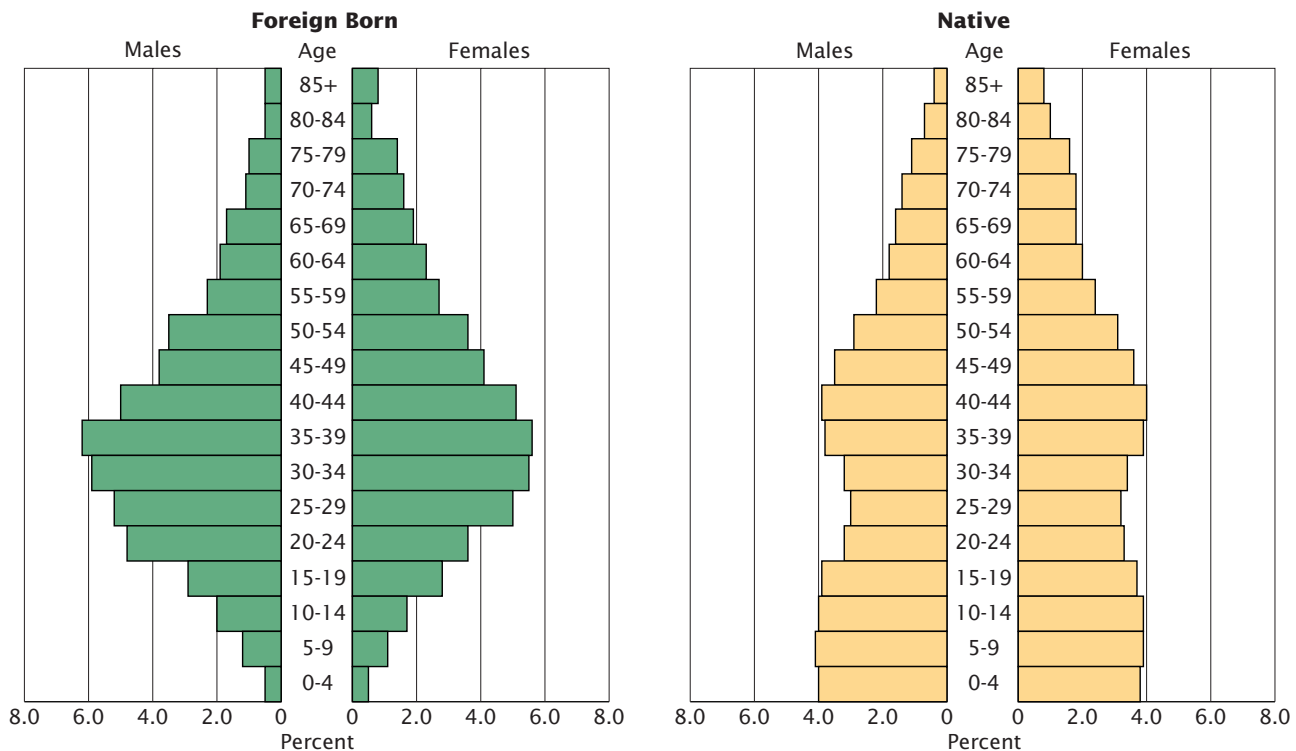
28 percent among the native population. The primary reason for this disparity is that most of the foreign-born arrive in this country as adults and their children who are born here are U.S. citizens.

In 2000, 27 percent of family households maintained by a foreign-born householder had five or more members, compared with 13 percent of family households maintained by a native-born householder. Among family households with a Central American householder, 42 percent were this large, compared with only 10 percent of those with a European householder.

The foreign-born were less likely than the native population to have a high school diploma. Among the population aged 25 and older, 67 percent of the foreign-born were high school graduates, compared with 87 percent of the native-born population. The high school graduation rates ranged from 84 percent for those from Asia to 50 percent for those from Latin America.

The 1999 poverty rate was 17 percent for the foreign-born population, compared with 11 percent for the

Figure 17-2.
Population by Nativity, Age, and Sex: 2000
(In percent)¹



¹ Each bar represents the population within a specified sex and age group, as a percent of the total foreign born or native population.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

native population.³ Those without U.S. citizenship were more than twice as likely as naturalized citizens to be living below the poverty level (21 percent compared with 9 percent). Poverty rates for the foreign-born population ranged from 9 percent for Europeans to 22 percent for Latin Americans. Yet these figures masked further differences within each group. For example, among Latin Americans, the poverty rate for Central Americans (24 percent) was twice as high as the rate for South Americans (12 percent).

³ The March 2000 Current Population Survey collected poverty statistics for 1999.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *The Foreign Born Population in the United States: March 2000* by Lisa Lollock.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on "F" and select "Foreign-Born Population Data."
- Contact the Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2403 or e-mail pop@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.