

Coming From the Americas: A Profile of the Nation's Foreign-Born Population From Latin America (2000 Update)

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One-half of foreign-born population is from Latin America.

In 2000, 14.5 million, or about half, of the nation's 28.4 million foreign-born residents were born in Latin America.

The size of the foreign-born population from Latin America has grown rapidly. In 1960, about 900,000 (or 9 percent of the total foreign-born population) came from Latin America. By 1990, this population numbered 8.4 million, or 44 percent of the total.

Mexico accounts for largest share of Latin American and foreign-born population.

In 2000, Mexico accounted for more than one-quarter of the foreign-born population and more than half of the foreign born from Latin America. The population from Mexico was nearly six times as large as the foreign-born population from the next highest country, China.

Of the remaining migrants from Latin America, 1.9 million were born in Central American countries (other than Mexico); 2.8 million in Caribbean countries; and 1.9 million in South

America.¹ In addition to Mexico, three other Latin American nations (Cuba, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador) were among the nation's top 10 countries of foreign birth.² (See Figure 1.)

Latin American-born residents are concentrated in few areas.

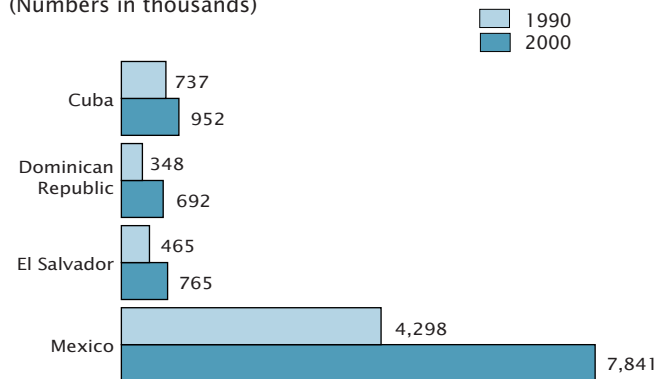
Although residents born in Latin America can be found across the country, most are concentrated in only a few areas. These areas differ in the place of birth of their Latin American-born residents. For

¹The U.S. Census Bureau classifies Mexico as part of Central America. There is no statistical difference between the 1.9 million from other Central American countries and the 1.9 million from South America. Also, Caribbean countries include the Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago.

²Due to sample size, the foreign-born populations from Cuba, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador are not ranked by size.

Figure 1.
Top Countries of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population From Latin America: 1990 and 2000

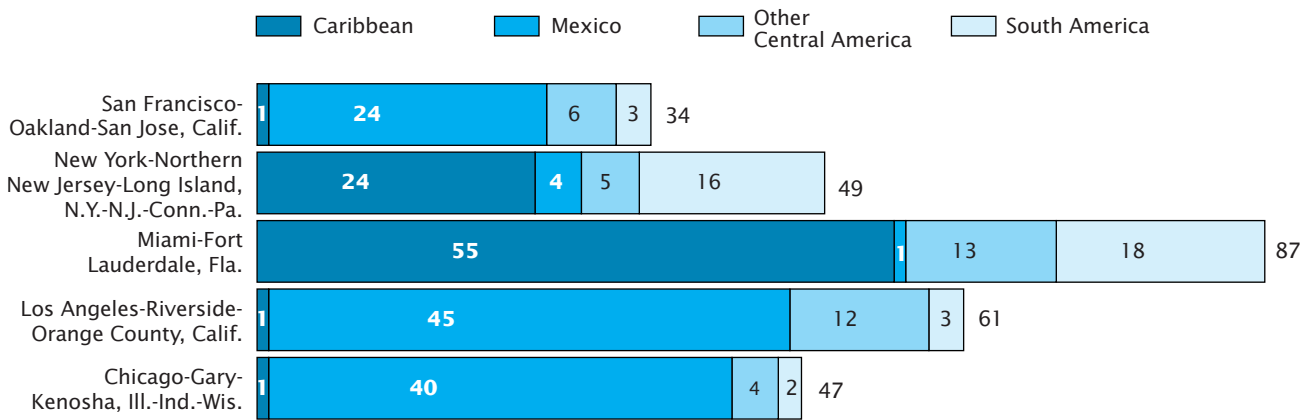
(Numbers in thousands)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, P23-206, Figure 3-1.

Figure 2.

Percent of the Foreign-Born Population From Latin America by Subregion for Selected Metropolitan Areas: 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, PPL-145, Table 5-2D.

example, about 3 of 4 people born in the Caribbean live either in the New York or the Miami metro areas.

Those born in Mexico, on the other hand, are found largely in the Los Angeles area and in the state of Texas. Combined, these two areas account for almost half of the Mexican-born population (3.6 million).

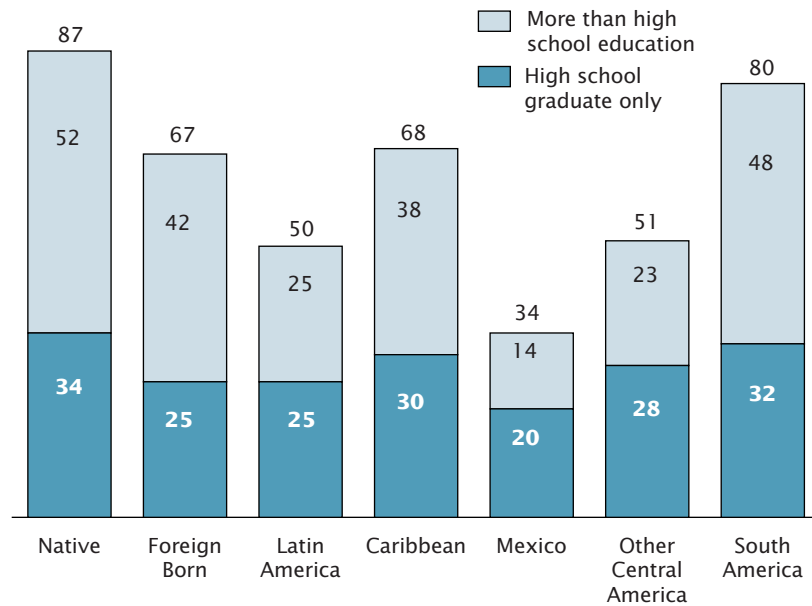
A considerable share of both the Central and South American-born populations live in the New York and Los Angeles metro areas. Specifically, about 560,000 of the nation's 1.9 million Central American-born people reside in the Los Angeles metro area. Likewise, about 750,000 of the nation's 1.9 million South American-born residents are in the New York metro area.

As a result of this settlement pattern, in 2 of the 5 leading metropolitan destinations of the nation's foreign born — the Los Angeles and the Miami areas —

Figure 3.

High School or Higher Education by Nativity and Region of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population: 2000

(Percent of the population 25 years and older)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, P23-206, Figures 14-1 and 14-2, Table 13-1D.

people from Latin America comprised at least half of the foreign-born population. In the Miami area,

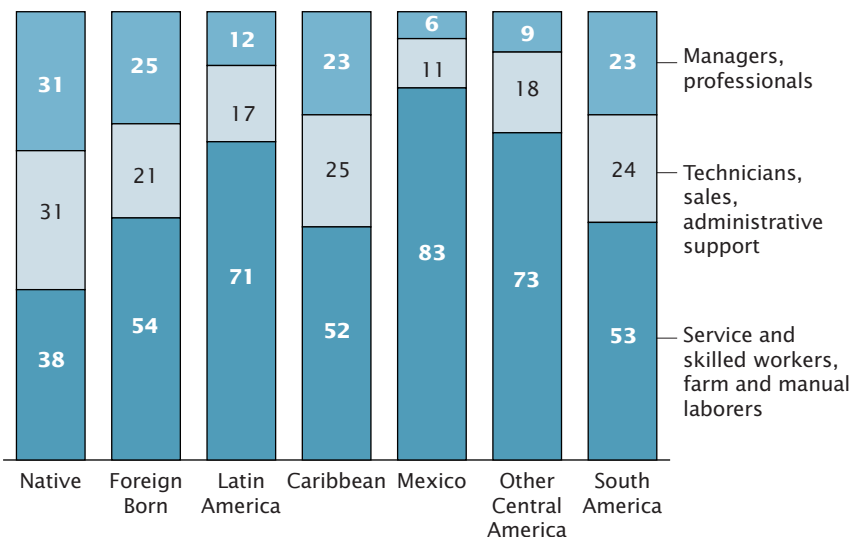
they made up the overwhelming majority. (See Figure 2.)³

³Figures 2 through 4 present rounded percentages in bar charts.

Figure 4.

Occupational Distribution by Nativity and Selected Regions of Birth of the Foreign-Born Workers: 2000

(Percent distribution)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, P23-206, Figures 16-1 and 16-2.

Citizenship rates for the Latin American foreign born are relatively low.

In 2000, 28 percent of the foreign-born population from Latin America were naturalized citizens. To put this percentage in perspective, the citizenship rates for those from Europe (52 percent) and Asia (47 percent) were much higher. The Latin American-born population's low rate is attributable primarily to even lower citizenship rates for foreign-born residents from Mexico (20 percent). Those from the Caribbean, in contrast, have a citizenship rate of 47 percent.⁴

Place of birth is key indicator of Latin American-born population's well-being.

The socioeconomic characteristics of the nation's Latin American-born population vary by region of birth.

⁴The rates for those from Asia and those from the Caribbean are not statistically different from one another.

The Mexican born especially tend to differ from other groups. Unless otherwise indicated, the data in the following examples are for 2000:

- Education** — The proportion of the population 25 years and older with a high school education or higher stood at 50 percent among the Latin American-born population as a whole. Within this group, the percentage ranged greatly, from 80 percent for those born in South America to 34 percent for those born in Mexico. The nation's native population had a rate of 87 percent. (See Figure 3.)
- Labor force participation** — Among those ages 25 to 54, Latin American women had a labor force participation rate of 63 percent, ranging from 74 percent for Caribbean-born people to 55 percent for those born in Mexico. The rate for all native women was 79 percent (not significantly different from the

rate for Caribbean women).

Among men, on the other hand, participation rates varied little from group to group.

- Occupation** — Twelve percent of Latin American-born workers were employed in managerial and professional specialty occupations. Within this group, the range was from 23 percent for South Americans and those born in Caribbean countries to 6 percent for Mexicans. The corresponding rate for the nation's native workers was 31 percent.⁵

Conversely, 71 percent of all workers born in Latin America were service or skilled workers or farm or manual laborers. Fifty-two percent of people born in Caribbean countries, 53 percent of those born in South America (not statistically different from the rate for the Caribbean), 83 percent of Mexican workers and 38 percent of the nation's native population were in this category. (See Figure 4.)

- Earnings** — The 1999 median earnings of full-time, year-round workers born in Latin America were \$21,000 for men and \$17,200 for women. Median earnings for workers born in the Caribbean (\$27,000 for men and \$21,300 for women) and from South America (\$27,500 for men and \$23,100 for women) were not statistically different from each other. The median for Mexican-born male workers (\$19,200) was not statistically different from that of female workers from the Caribbean or South America.

The median earnings of Mexican-born female workers (\$15,100) were below the respective medi-

⁵Rates for foreign born from South America and the Caribbean are not statistically different.

ans for both male and female workers from the Caribbean and South America and Mexican-born men but not statistically different from earnings for female workers from Central American countries (\$15,900). The medians for native workers were \$37,500 for men and \$26,700 for women.

- **Household income** — The median income in 1999 of households with a householder born in Latin America was \$29,400. The median for householders born in South America (\$40,500) was higher than for those born elsewhere in Latin America. For all households with a native householder, the corresponding median was \$41,400.⁶
- **Poverty** — The poverty rate in 1999 was 22 percent for U.S. residents born in Latin America. Poverty rates ranged from 12 percent for South Americans to 26 percent for those born in Mexico. The rate was 11 percent for the nation's native population.⁶
- **Program participation** — In 1999, 30 percent of households with Latin American-born householders participated in one or more means-tested, noncash programs, such as Medicaid. The participation rate for all households with native householders was 15 percent.
- **Health insurance** — For the population from Latin America, 54 percent had health insurance for all or part of the year. Within this group, the rates varied considerably, from 69 percent and 67 percent, respectively, for the populations from the Caribbean and South America (not significantly different from each other)

to 47 percent for the population from Mexico. For the native population, the rate was 87 percent.

- **Homeownership** — In 2000, 41 percent of Latin American-born householders owned the home in which they lived. There was little variation in the homeownership rate among Latin American groups. In contrast, the homeownership rate was 70 percent for households with a native householder.

Other differences among the Latin American-born population:

- **Median age** — The median age of Latin American-born residents was 35 years old. There was some variation within this group, however, as medians ranged from 33 years for those born in Mexico to 42 years for people born in the Caribbean.⁷
- **Number of children** — Seventy-three percent of the married-couple households with a foreign-born householder from Latin America lived with one or more related children under 18. By comparison, 46 percent of married-couple householders with a native householder had at least one related child. Among married-couple householders with a foreign-born householder from Mexico, the proportion was 80 percent.
- **Household size** — The average size of households with Latin American householders, 3.72 persons, was larger than that of native households, which averaged 2.54 persons. Among Latin American households, those with a Mexican-born householder averaged 4.21 persons.

More information:

The information in this Census Brief is based on findings from *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, Current Population Reports, Special Studies P23-206. The report may be found on the Internet at <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign.html>>. Paper copies also may be ordered from the Census Bureau (Tel. 301-457-2422; e-mail: <pop@census.gov>). Funding for the report was provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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The data in the report are from the March 2000 Current Population Survey. Data from 1990 and earlier censuses are included for comparison. Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. The Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program uses different methods to estimate population by nativity and may show slightly different estimates of foreign-born and native populations from those presented here. Census 2000 data on nativity are scheduled to be released during 2002.

⁶ Not statistically different from South America.

⁷ Medians for Latin American and native residents were not statistically different from one another.