

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

In 1997, 13.1 million, or about half, of the nation's 25.8 million foreign-born residents were born in Latin America.

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

Mexico accounts for sizable share of Latin American-born population.

In 1997, Mexico accounted for 28 percent of the foreign-born population and more than half of the population from Latin America. The population from Mexico was about six times as large as the foreign-born population from the next highest country.

Of the remaining migrants from Latin America, 1.8 million were born in other Central American countries; 2.8 million were born in Caribbean countries, and 1.5 million were born in South America¹.

¹The U.S. Census Bureau classifies Mexico as part of Central America. There is no statistical difference between the 1.8 million from other Central American countries and the 1.5 million from South America.

Besides Mexico, three other Latin American nations (Cuba, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador) figured among the top 10 countries of birth of the nation's foreign born². (See Figure 1.)

Latin American-born residents are concentrated in a handful of areas.

Although residents born in Latin America can be found all across the country, most live in only a few areas. These areas differ in the place of birth of their Latin American-born residents. For example, about 3 out of every 4 people born in the Caribbean live either in the New York or the Miami metro areas.

²Due to the sample size, these countries are not ranked by population size. See P23-195, page 13, footnote 4.

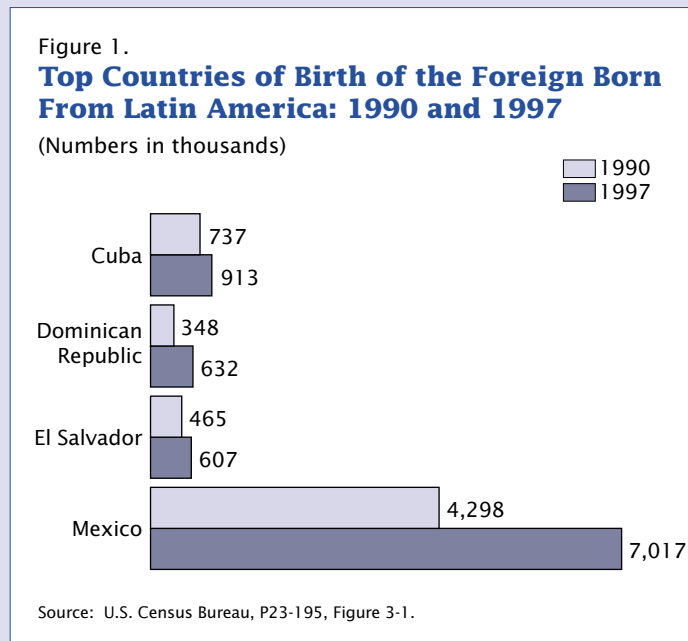
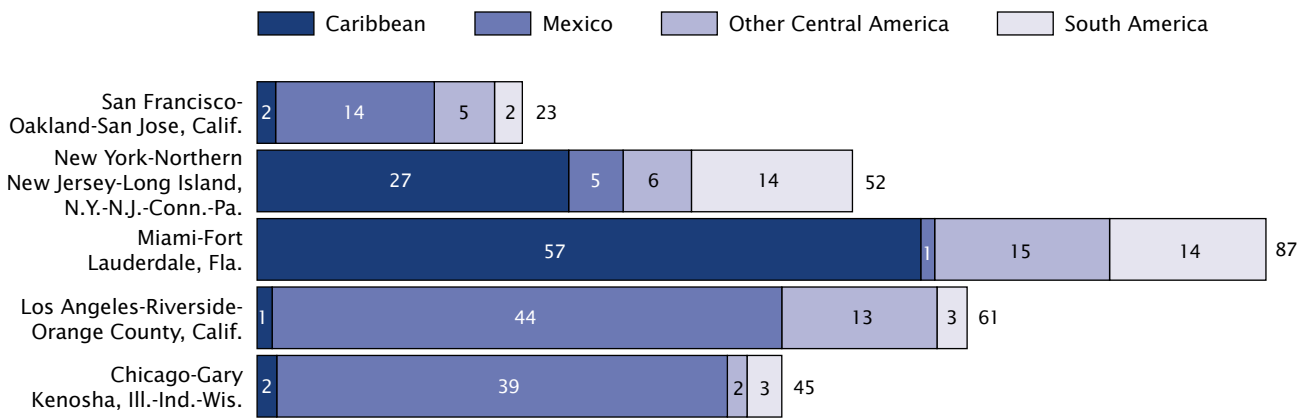


Figure 2.
Percent of the Foreign-Born Population From Regions of Latin America for Selected Metropolitan Areas: 1997



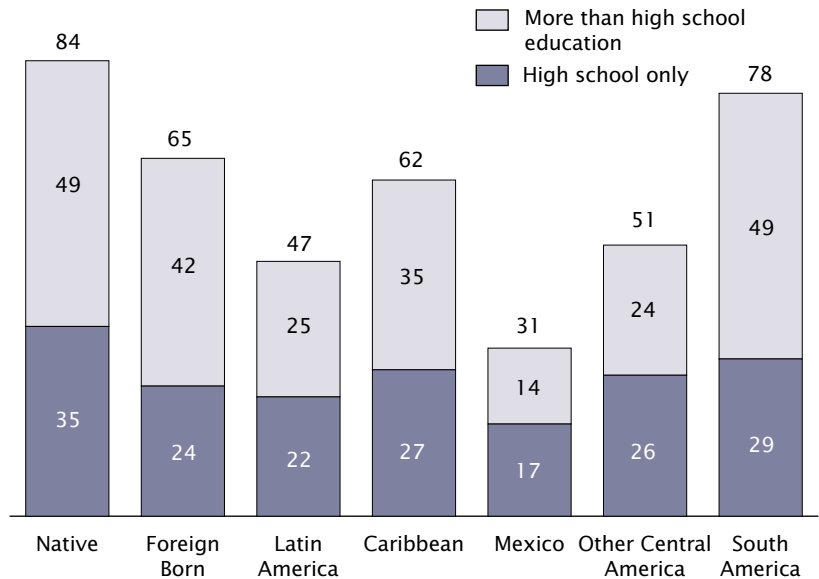
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, PPL-115, Table 5-2D.

Those born in Mexico, on the other hand, are concentrated in the Los Angeles and Chicago metro areas and in the state of Texas. Combined, these three entities account for more than half of the Mexican-born population (3.9 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 600,000 of the nation's 1.8 million non-Mexican Central American-born people reside in the Los Angeles metro area. Likewise, about 600,000 of the nation's 1.5 million South American born are residents of the New York metro area.

As a result of this settlement pattern, in 3 of the 5 leading metropolitan destinations of the nation's foreign born — the Los Angeles, Miami and New York areas — 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.)

Figure 3.
High School Graduate or Higher Education by Nativity and Region of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population: 1997
 (Percent of the population 25 years and older)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, PPL-115, Table 13-1D.

Citizenship rates for Latin American born are relatively low.

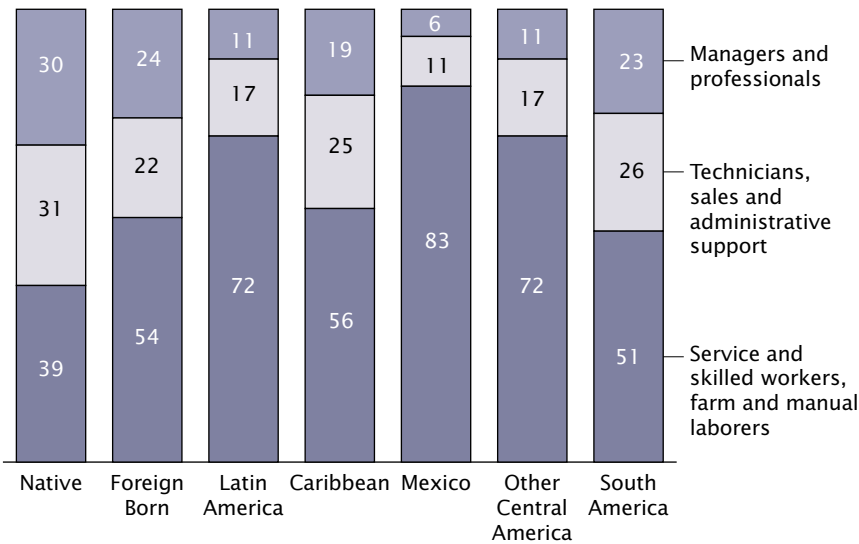
In 1997, 24 percent of the foreign-born population from Latin America were naturalized citizens. To put this percentage in perspective, the

rates for those from Europe (53 percent) and Asia (44 percent) were higher. The low proportion for the Latin American born is attributable primarily to the low citizenship rates of the foreign born from Mexico (15 percent). Those from

Figure 4.

Occupational Distribution of Workers by Nativity and Selected Regions of Birth of the Foreign Born: 1997

(Percent distribution)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, P23-195, Table 15-1D.

the Caribbean, in contrast, have a citizenship rate of 41 percent³.

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

The socioeconomic characteristics of the nation's Latin American born vary according to the region in which they were born. The Mexican born especially tend to differ from other groups. Unless otherwise indicated, the data in the following examples pertain to 1997:

- **Education** — The proportion of the population 25 years old and older who had a high school education or higher stood at 47 percent among all Latin American born. Within this group, the percentage ranged greatly, from 78 percent of those born in South America to 31 percent of those born in Mexico. Natives

³The rates for those from Asia and those from the Caribbean are not significantly different from one another.

had a rate of 84 percent. (See Figure 3.)

- **Labor force participation** — Among those aged 25 to 54, Latin American women had a labor force participation rate of 62 percent, which ranged from 74 percent for the Caribbean born to 52 percent for the Mexican born. The rate for native women was 78 percent (not significantly different from the rate for Caribbean women). Among men, on the other hand, there was little variation regardless of group.
- **Occupation** — Eleven 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 to 6 percent for Mexicans. The corresponding rate for native workers was 30 percent⁴.

⁴Numbers for South America and native are not statistically different.

Conversely, 72 percent of all workers born in Latin America were service or skilled workers or farm or manual laborers. Fifty-one percent of those born in South America, 83 percent of Mexican-born workers and 39 percent of the native population were in this category. (See Figure 4.)

- **Earnings** — The 1996 median earnings of full-time, year-round workers born in Latin America were \$18,600 for men and \$16,700 for women. Median earnings for workers born in the Caribbean (\$23,900 for men and \$20,200 for women) and from South America (\$25,200 for men and \$21,100 for women) were not significantly different from each other.

Among workers born in Mexico, the median earnings of both men (\$16,800) and women (\$13,700) were below the respective median for workers born in the Caribbean or South America. Meanwhile, medians for native workers were \$33,200 for men and \$24,100 for women⁴.

- **Household income** — The median income in 1996 of households with a householder born in Latin America was \$24,100. The median of households with a householder born in South America (\$31,800) was higher than for households where the householder was born elsewhere in the region. For households with a native householder, the corresponding median was \$36,100⁴.
- **Poverty** — The poverty rate in 1996 was 28 percent for those born in Latin America. Among the Latin American born, poverty rates ranged from 15 percent for South Americans to 34 percent for those born in Mexico. The

rate was 13 percent for the native population⁴.

- **Program participation** — In 1996, 33 percent of households with Latin American-born householders participated in one or more means-tested noncash programs, such as Medicaid. Among Latin American groups, the rates were similar, except among households with householders born in South America, whose rate was 21 percent. The participation rate for households with native householders was 17 percent, not significantly different from households with South American-born householders.
- **Health insurance and pension plans** — For the population from Latin America, 54 percent had health insurance for all or part of the year. Within this group, the proportion ranged from 69 percent and 66 percent, respectively, for the populations from the Caribbean and South America (not significantly different from each other) to 46 percent for the population from Mexico. For the native population, the rate was 86 percent.

Similarly, 31 percent of workers born in Latin America had employers who offered pension plans. The proportion was lower for workers from Mexico (26 percent) and higher for those from South America (43 percent). The rate for native workers was 56 percent.

- **Homeownership** — In 1997, 38 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 68 percent for native households.

Other differences among the Latin American born:

- **Median age** — The median age of Latin American-born residents was 34 years old. There was some variation within this group, however, as medians ranged from 31 years for those born in Mexico to 37 years for the South American born. Natives had the same median age as the Latin American born as a whole.
- **Number of children** — Sixty-six percent of families with householders born in Latin America lived with one or more of their own children under 18 years old. The corresponding figures for areas in Latin America ranged from 74 percent for householders from Mexico to 53 percent for Caribbean-born householders. By comparison, 48 percent of families with a native householder lived with one or more of their own children.⁵
- **Household size** — Among Latin American householders, average household size ranged from about 3.17 for people born in South America to 4.38 for those born in Mexico. The average size of native households was 2.56 people, not statistically

⁵Numbers for Caribbean born and native are not statistically different.

different from the ratio for South American households.

More information:

The information in this Census Brief is based on findings from *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 1997*, Current Population Reports, Special Studies P23-195. 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 1997 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.