Population Estimates
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Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2009

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This report presents estimates of the legal permanent resident (LPR) population living in the United States on January 1, 2009. The LPR population includes persons granted lawful permanent residence, for example, "green card" recipients, but not those who had become U.S. citizens. The estimates are shown for the total LPR population and the LPR population eligible to apply to naturalize by country of birth, state of residence, and the year LPR status was obtained. Data for the estimates were obtained primarily from administrative records of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The methodology used for the 2009 estimates is similar to that used in previous DHS estimates (see Rytina, 2009).

In summary, an estimated 12.5 million LPRs lived in the United States on January 1, 2009. 7.9 million of those LPRs were eligible to naturalize.

BACKGROUND

Data on the size and characteristics of the foreign-born population are needed to assess the impact of immigration and integration of immigrants into U.S. society. The decennial census and monthly household surveys of the Census Bureau include questions on place of birth, citizenship, and year of entry into the United States. These data provide a wealth of information on the total foreign-born population, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens. However, national population data on the major subcategories of non-citizens, including LPRs, students, temporary workers, and unauthorized immigrants, are not readily available from any source and must be estimated. An alien registration program requiring all legally resident aliens to report their status annually to the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service was discontinued by Congress in 1981. Immigration data collected by DHS measure administrative events such as the number of aliens granted lawful permanent residence or the number approved for asylum, but not the population of legal permanent residents or the population of asylees living in the United States at a point in time. Estimates of the LPR population have been derived primarily from Census and DHS data by estimating a base population as of a certain date and adding subsequent components of population change (see Passel and Clark, 1998; Hoefer, 1996). A variant of this approach has been used by DHS since 2002 to estimate the resident LPR population.

METHODOLOGY

Separate population estimates were developed for LPRs who entered the United States before 1980 and during the 1980-2008 period. The two sets of estimates were added together to obtain the overall estimated population as of January 1, 2009.

Estimates for LPR Entrants Prior to 1980

It was assumed that all non-citizen residents of the United States in 2009 who entered before 1980 were legal permanent residents. Under the registry provisions of immigration law, aliens of good moral character who are not ineligible to naturalize, are not removable on terrorism grounds and have lived in the United States continuously since January 1, 1972 are eligible for LPR status. Additionally, certain persons living in the United States before 1982 as unauthorized residents were permitted to adjust to LPR status under the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. DHS estimates of the unauthorized immigrant population, using the same rationale, assume that the foreign-born population entering the United States before 1980 is legally resident (see Hoefer, Rytina, and Baker, 2010). Estimates of the LPR population in 2009 that entered before 1980 were obtained from data from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau on non-citizen residents with a year of entry prior to 1980. The ACS data were tabulated by year of

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entry (assumed to be the year that LPR status was obtained), country of birth, and state of residence.

Estimates for LPR Entrants from 1980 through 2008

Data on LPRs who entered the United States between January 1980 and December 2008 were obtained from application case tracking systems of USCIS. Information on persons obtaining LPR status is supplied on two applications. The Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration (DS-230) of the U.S. Department of State is used by aliens living outside the United States. DS-230 applicants who subsequently become LPRs are known as "new arrivals." The Application to Adjust Status to Permanent Residence (I-485) is used by aliens already living in the United States. I-485 applicants who become LPRs are referred to as "adjustments of status." Information on the naturalization of LPRs comes from the Application for Naturalization (N-400). The N-400 application is used by persons aged 18 years and over. Basic applicant information maintained in the case tracking systems includes alien identification number (A-number), date of birth, country of birth, gender, U.S. address, date LPR status or naturalization was obtained, and category of admission for LPR status.

Records for LPR entrants from January 1980 through December 2008 were matched by A-number with naturalization records for the same time period in order to exclude LPRs who subsequently naturalized. Several adjustments were then made to reduce the aggregated total of 1980-2008 LPRs to a 2009 LPR population of 1980-2008 entrants. The adjustments for emigration and mortality are methodologically the same as those used in DHS unauthorized immigrant population estimates. An adjustment for derivative citizenship is unique to the LPR population estimates.

LPRs who entered the United States before 1980 were excluded as these persons were counted in the pre-1980 entrant population from the ACS. The date of entry for "new arrival" LPRs is the date of approval for LPR status. For "adjustment of status" LPRs, however, the entry date is usually not recorded directly so the year of last entry prior to adjustment of status was selected as an approximation. Year of last entry was imputed where missing (approximately 40 percent of adjustment of status records during 1998-2005) using category of admission, year of LPR adjustment, and known last entry date. Additional adjustments, described below, were made for LPR children who had derived citizenship, mortality, and emigration.

Derivative Citizenship. Most LPRs become U.S. citizens by applying for naturalization (using the N-400 form) when they are at least 18 years old. Some LPRs, however, become U.S. citizens by deriving citizenship upon the naturalization of a parent and may, but are not required to, apply for a certificate of citizenship (using Form N-600). The number of LPRs deriving citizenship was estimated from applications filed for certificate of citizenship from 1980 through 2008. This approach, like its predecessor,[1] produces a conservative estimate of derivative citizenship but was adopted because it is straightforward and produces a slightly larger and presumably more accurate estimate for recent years.

[1] OIS previously assumed that the cumulative "citizenship" rate (derivative citizenship plus naturalization) for LPRs who were less than 16 years of age when they became LPRs was the same as the rate for persons who were 16 years of age when obtaining LPR status.

Mortality. LPRs were survived to 2009 by age (when LPR status was obtained) and gender using mortality rates by age and sex from 1989-91 life tables (National Center for Health Statistics, 1997). The median age of foreign nationals at the time they become LPRs is about 31 years (Monger, 2010). As a result, mortality has very little impact on the estimates for recent LPRs but a greater impact for those who became LPRs during the 1980s.

Emigration. Most observers agree that a sizable number of LPRs emigrate from the United States. The U.S. government has not collected official statistics since 1957. National data that directly measure emigration do not exist. This report uses an average annual rate of emigration of approximately 1 percent based on estimates for the foreign-born population from Census data (Ahmed and Robinson, 1994). The rates vary by years of residence in the United States and naturalization status. (LPRs who subsequently naturalized were not considered at risk of emigration until after becoming citizens). LPRs who entered the United States as asylees and refugees were assumed not to emigrate.

After adjusting for derivative citizenship, mortality, and emigration, estimates for 1980-2008 entrants were tabulated by the year LPR status was obtained, country of birth, and state of residence. The use of state of residence provided on the application for permanent residence ignores subsequent internal migration and affects the state-level estimates to the extent that migration to and from each state is not the same.

LPR Population Eligible to Naturalize

LPRs are eligible to apply for naturalization after meeting U.S. residency and other requirements. This report estimates the LPR population eligible to naturalize based on residence requirements using class of admission and the year LPR status was obtained. Most LPRs are required to meet a five-year residency requirement for naturalization. Spouses of U.S. citizens are eligible to apply in three years. There are several other exceptions to the five-year residency requirement, most of which affect small numbers of immigrants.

It was assumed that all LPRs are required to meet a five-year residency requirement except for those whose permanent resident status was as a spouse of a U.S. citizen. Certain categories of immigrants receive credit for the period prior to the actual grant of lawful permanent resident status. The credited time or earlier dates are not included in the LPR records used for this analysis and must be estimated. Asylees are credited one year in asylum status toward lawful permanent resident status. Asylees were therefore assumed eligible to naturalize four years after approval of the adjustment of status application.

Immigrants adjusting to LPR status as refugees, Lautenberg parolees, or through cancellation of removal also receive credit for residence in the United States prior to the actual grant of lawful permanent residence based, respectively, on the date of entry into the United States as a refugee, the date of parole, and the date of cancellation of removal. It was assumed that two years elapse between the earlier dates and the date of approval of the application for permanent residence so that these LPRs are eligible to apply for naturalization approximately three years after approval of their application for adjustment.

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FINDINGS

Overview

An estimated 12.5 million legal permanent residents (LPRs) were living in the United States on January 1, 2009 (see Table 1). Of the 12.5 million, an estimated 7.9 million were eligible to naturalize. Between January 2007 and 2009, the LPR population remained constant, and the population eligible to naturalize declined 3 percent. In general, the size of the LPR population changes less rapidly than the total legally resident population because increases in the number of persons becoming LPRs each year are offset by persons naturalizing.

Table 1.

Size of the Legal Permanent Resident Population

Legal permanent residents	2007	2008	2009
Total	12,440,000	12,600,000	12,450,000
Eligible to naturalize	8,130,000	8,160,000	7,870,000
Not eligible to naturalize	4,310,000	4,440,000	4,590,000

Notes: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Components. The entries in Table 2 show the contribution of each data source and adjustment to the final estimated LPR population in 2009. According to USCIS administrative records, 24.0 million foreign nationals obtained LPR status between 1980 and 2008. By the end of 2008, an estimated 9.0 million (38 percent) had naturalized; 1.2 million (5 percent) had derived citizenship before becoming 18 years old; and 3.1 million (13 percent) had died or emigrated. An estimated 4.6 million LPRs had not met the residency requirement for naturalization, leaving 7.9 million LPRs eligible to apply to naturalize in 2009.

Table 2.

Components of the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2009

Category		Number
	LPR status obtained between 1980-2008	24,020,000
minus	Naturalizations 1980-2008	9,040,000
minus	Derivative citizenship 1980-2008	1,170,000
minus	Emigration and mortality 1980-2008	3,100,000
equals	LPRs survived to 1/1/2009	10,700,000
plus	LPR status obtained prior to 1980 (ACS)	1,750,000
equals	Estimated LPR population as of 1/1/2009	12,450,000
minus	LPRs not eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2009	4,590,000
equals	Estimated LPR population eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2009	7,870,000

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Error. The major sources of error in the estimates are the assumptions made about emigration, mortality, and derivative citizenship. Errors in the estimate of these components affect the 1980-2008 entrants portion of the 2009 LPR estimate. The estimates derived from the 2008 ACS for LPRs entering before 1980 are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. The estimated margin of error at the 90 percent confidence level for the 1.8 million estimate is less than plus or minus 0.1 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009). Estimates by country of birth and state of residence are based on smaller numbers of observations and are affected more by sampling error. Major sources of non-sampling error include possible misreporting of citizenship status and year of entry by ACS respondents.

Year LPR Status Obtained

Nearly 77 percent of LPRs in the United States in 2009 obtained permanent residence in 1990 or later (see Table 3). Fifty-three percent gained LPR status between 2000 and 2008, and 14 percent became LPRs before 1980.

Table 3.

Year LPR Status Obtained for the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2009

Year	All legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,450,000	100.0	7,870,000	100.0
Before 1960	190,000	1.5	190,000	2.4
1960 to 1969	440,000	3.5	440,000	5.6
1970 to 1979	1,120,000	9.0	1,120,000	14.3
1980 to 1989	1,160,000	9.3	1,160,000	14.7
1990 to 1999	2,920,000	23.5	2,770,000	35.2
2000 to 2004	2,610,000	21.0	1,860,000	23.7
2005 to 2008	4,010,000	32.2	330,000	4.1

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Country of Birth

Mexico was the leading country of origin of the LPR population in 2009 (see Table 4). An estimated 3.3 million or 26 percent of LPRs came from Mexico. The next leading source country was the Philippines (0.6 million), followed by People's Republic of China (0.5 million), India (0.5 million), and the Dominican Republic (0.4 million). Forty-two percent of LPRs in 2009 were born in one of these five countries. The 10 leading countries of origin, which also include Cuba, Canada, El Salvador, Vietnam, and the United Kingdom, represented 55 percent of the LPR population.

The leading countries of origin of the LPR population eligible to apply to naturalize are similar to those for the total LPR population. Differences in rankings tend to reflect either country of origin variation in the propensity to naturalize or changes in LPR flows and naturalization eligibility.

State of Residence

The data in Table 5 show the estimated LPR population for the leading states of residence. Because the data for most of the population are based on residence at the time LPR status was obtained, the relative rankings are more accurate than the actual population estimates by state.

California was the leading state of residence with an estimated 3.3 million LPRs in 2009. The next leading states of residence were New York (1.5 million), Texas (1.2 million), and Florida (1.2 million). These four states were home to 58 percent of LPRs in 2009. The next leading states of residence were New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Virginia, Washington, and Arizona. The 10 leading states represented 75 percent of the LPR population. The leading states of residence of the estimated LPR population and population eligible to naturalize were generally the same.

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Table 4.

Country of Birth of Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2008

Country of birth	Legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,450,000	100.0	7,870,000	100.0
Mexico	3,280,000	26.3	2,570,000	32.7
Philippines	550,000	4.4	280,000	3.6
China, People's Republic	530,000	4.3	190,000	2.5
India	500,000	4.0	200,000	2.5
Dominican Republic	420,000	3.3	280,000	3.6
Cuba	360,000	2.9	230,000	3.0
Canada	320,000	2.6	250,000	3.2
El Salvador	320,000	2.6	240,000	3.0
Vietnam	320,000	2.5	200,000	2.5
United Kingdom	290,000	2.4	230,000	2.9
Korea[1]	240,000	1.9	140,000	1.7
Haiti	230,000	1.8	130,000	1.7
Colombia	230,000	1.8	100,000	1.3
Jamaica	220,000	1.8	140,000	1.8
Germany	180,000	1.5	150,000	1.9
Guatemala	180,000	1.4	110,000	1.4
Poland	150,000	1.2	100,000	1.2
Japan	130,000	1.1	110,000	1.3
Peru	130,000	1.1	70,000	0.8
Pakistan	120,000	1.0	50,000	0.7
Other	3,730,000	29.9	2,090,000	26.6

[1]Korea includes both North and South Korea.
Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 5.

State of Residence of Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2009

State of residence	Legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,450,000	100.0	7,870,000	100.0
California	3,310,000	26.6	2,320,000	29.4
New York	1,530,000	12.3	920,000	11.7
Texas	1,220,000	9.8	860,000	11.0
Florida	1,180,000	9.4	680,000	8.6
New Jersey	560,000	4.5	320,000	4.1
Illinois	540,000	4.3	340,000	4.3
Massachusetts	310,000	2.5	170,000	2.2
Virginia	260,000	2.1	130,000	1.7
Washington	260,000	2.1	160,000	2.0
Arizona	230,000	1.9	160,000	2.0
Maryland	230,000	1.8	120,000	1.5
Georgia	230,000	1.8	110,000	1.4
Pennsylvania	220,000	1.8	120,000	1.6
Michigan	210,000	1.7	120,000	1.5
Connecticut	150,000	1.2	90,000	1.1
North Carolina	140,000	1.1	70,000	0.9
Ohio	140,000	1.1	70,000	0.9
Colorado	130,000	1.1	90,000	1.1
Minnesota	130,000	1.0	70,000	0.8
Nevada	120,000	0.9	70,000	0.9
Other	1,360,000	10.9	870,000	11.1

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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