

A young boy from Lebanon becomes a U.S. citizen.



COMING TO AMERICA

The United States is often referred to as a nation of immigrants—and new government data prove it. Who is coming to this country today, and where are they coming from? BY PATRICIA SMITH

Look around your school. How many people do you know who were born in another country or whose parents were?

Chances are it is quite a few. New data from the **U.S. Census Bureau** show that one in five United States residents is an immigrant (someone who was born in one country but moved to another) or the young child of an immigrant. Immigrants now make up 13.7 percent of the

U.S. population. That is the largest share in more than 100 years.

The data also show that the mix of people moving here is changing. In the early 2000s, the majority of immigrants came from Latin America. Today, Asians make up the biggest group of newcomers.

“We think of immigrants as being . . . from Latin America, but for recent arrivals, that’s much less the case,” says William Frey. He

analyzed the new information. However, Latin Americans still make up the largest group among *all* immigrants living in the U.S. (see circle graphs).

The census findings come at a time when immigration has become a heated topic among Americans. President Donald Trump and some lawmakers have voiced criticism about immigration. Trump has restricted the number and type of

people coming into the U.S.

But other lawmakers say immigration is important to the well-being of the nation. They say that immigrants play a big part in our culture and economy.

Experts say the U.S. foreign-born population will continue to rise in coming years, no matter how the debate goes. The Pew Research Center estimates that by 2025, immigrants will make up more than 15 percent of the population. That would be the highest level ever.

Shifting Laws

The last historical peak in U.S. immigration came in 1910. That is when large numbers of Europeans were fleeing poverty and violence in their home countries, including Germany, Italy, and Poland. Congress set **quotas** in the 1920s that sharply reduced the number of immigrants. The quotas gave preference to Northern Europeans.

In 1965, a new law did away with the quotas. That changed the nation's immigrant population. Congress aimed to treat people from all countries equally. It encouraged the arrival of skilled, educated workers. Officials also wanted to make it easier for immigrants to bring their family members here. The changes led to a new wave of immigration from Latin America and Asia.

A Changing Population

For many years, more immigrants came to the U.S. from Mexico than any other country. But Mexico's economy has grown in recent decades. That improved life for many of its citizens. The number of Mexican immigrants coming to this country has declined since 2010.

At the same time, the number

of Chinese and Indian immigrants has surged. Both countries have large numbers of educated professionals who have been attracted by growing job opportunities in the U.S., says Frey.

The data also show that today more immigrants are college-educated than in the past. About 45 percent of newcomers have university degrees. That is compared with just 30 percent of people who were born in the U.S.

New Destinations

The Census Bureau data highlight further changes. Recent immigrants are settling in parts of the country where immigrant populations usually have been low. For example, North Dakota is the state with the biggest increase in foreign-born residents (*see the chart*). The number of immigrants living there in 2017 is almost two times what it was in 2010. North Dakota has taken in **refugees** from countries such as Iraq and Somalia in recent years.

The fact that immigrants are moving to places they have not traditionally gone could be a reason for some Americans' fears about newcomers, says David Bier. He is an immigration expert at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. But that fact is also a reason to be hopeful.

"There's great evidence that when people are initially exposed to diversity . . . [they] react negatively," he says. "But . . . as Americans become more familiar with immigrants, they accept them." ♦

With additional reporting by *The New York Times*

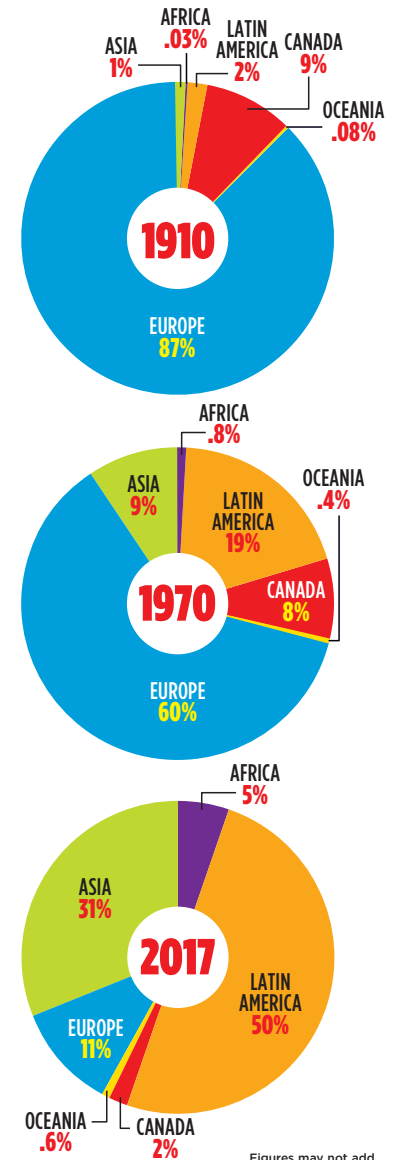


WRITE ABOUT IT!

How are recent waves of immigrants different from previous waves? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

WHERE IMMIGRANTS ARE FROM

Places of origin for the foreign-born in the U.S. have shifted over time.



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

States With the Biggest Jump in Foreign-Born Residents

(Change from 2010 to 2017)

1. North Dakota 86.7%
2. Delaware 37.0%
3. West Virginia 33.1%
4. South Dakota 32.2%
5. Wyoming 29.5%

SOURCE: William Frey, The Brookings Institution (analysis of census data)