

Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population and Population Eligible to Naturalize in 2004

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This paper presents estimates of the legal permanent resident (LPR) population living in the United States and of the population eligible to naturalize updated to September 2004¹ by the year LPR status was obtained, country of birth, and state of residence. The estimates are based primarily on a database created by the Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) from administrative records of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security. The methodology used for the 2004 estimates is essentially the same as that used for the 2002 and 2003 estimates (see Rytina, 2004 and 2005).

BACKGROUND

Data on the size and characteristics of various components of the foreign-born population are needed to assess the impact of immigration and assimilation 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, information on the major subcategories of non-citizens, including LPRs, students, temporary workers, and the unauthorized immigrant population is not readily available and must be estimated. The legal status of non-citizens is not routinely ascertained in censuses or surveys with sample sizes sufficient for making accurate national population estimates. An alien registration program at the Immigration and Naturalization Service, requiring all legally resident aliens to report their status annually, 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. The general approach has consisted of estimating a base population as of a certain date and then adding components of population change since that date (see Passel and Clark, 1998; Hoefler, 1996). The LPR population estimates produced by OIS since 2002 represent a variant of this same basic approach.

METHODOLOGY

Estimates were developed separately for foreign nationals becoming LPRs between 1973 and 2004 and prior to 1973. Since DHS administrative records were not automated until 1973, data from the American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau were used to estimate LPRs admitted in earlier years. The two sets of estimates were added together to produce the final estimates.

LPR Status Obtained Between 1973 and 2004

Data on foreign nationals becoming LPRs and on LPRs who naturalized between January, 1973 and September, 2004 were obtained from application based case tracking systems of USCIS. For LPR admissions, the Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration (DS-230) of the U.S. Department of State is used by aliens living abroad; the Application to Adjust Status to Permanent Residence (I-485) is used by aliens already living in the United States. The Application for Naturalization (N-400) is used primarily by LPRs ages 18 and over to apply for citizenship. The case tracking systems store basic demographic and administrative information on applicants including name, alien identification number (A-number), date of birth, country of birth, gender, marital status, occupation, U.S. address, date of permanent residence and class of admission (for LPRs), and date of naturalization (for LPRs becoming new citizens).

¹ In these reports, year refers to the last day of the fiscal year, for example, 2004 refers to September 30, 2004.



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OIS matched the records of persons becoming LPRs with the records of LPRs who naturalized by A-number. Exclusion of the matched records left a base population of persons who became LPRs between 1973 and 2004 but who had not naturalized as of the end of September 2004. The base population was then reduced because it included LPR children who had derived citizenship. The resulting population was then further reduced for estimated mortality and emigration between the date of admission for permanent residence and September, 2004 as described below.

Derivative Citizenship. Most LPRs become citizens either by applying for naturalization when they are at least 18 years old (through the standard naturalization application, the N-400) or, if they are under 18, by deriving citizenship upon the naturalization of their parents (one parent beginning in February, 2001). Aliens who derive citizenship are not required to apply for a certificate of citizenship reflecting their citizenship status. As a result, a complete count of LPRs who derive citizenship does not exist.

Evidence of derivative citizenship is suggested by the lower naturalization rates through 2004 of foreign nationals who were under age 16 when they became LPRs compared to those who were older, regardless of the year they obtained LPR status. For these population estimates, it was assumed that the cumulative "citizenship" rate (derivative citizenship plus naturalization) through 2004 of LPRs who were under age 16 when they became LPRs was the same as the rate for foreign nationals who were age 16 when they obtained LPR status. (Substituting age 15 or age 17 as the standard had little effect on the final LPR estimates.) The derivative citizenship rate implied by this assumption is probably conservative. Compared to older children, young LPR children have more years of exposure to the U.S. educational system, peers, culture, and other factors that predispose immigrants to U.S. citizenship.

Mortality. LPRs were survived to 2004 by their age when they obtained LPR status and gender using mortality rates by age and sex from 1989-91 life tables

(National Center for Health Statistics, 1997). The period 1989-91 was considered representative of the year LPR status was obtained. The average age of foreign nationals at the time they become LPRs is about 28 years. Therefore, mortality has little effect on the estimates for recent LPRs but a greater effect on foreign nationals who became LPRs earlier, for example, during the 1970s.

Emigration. Estimating emigration accurately is challenging because the U.S. government has not collected official statistics since 1957. Most observers agree that emigration of the LPR population from the U.S. is substantial. Between 1900 and 1990, an estimated one-quarter to one-third of LPRs emigrated from the U.S. (see Warren and Kraly, 1985; Ahmed and Robinson, 1994; Mulder et al., 2002). This analysis uses emigration rates developed for the 1980-90 period by Ahmed and Robinson (1994) that were modified by Robert Warren (2003) for the legally resident population. Warren's modification uses an emigration rate of 3.26 percent for the first year and decreases each subsequent year's rate by 5 percent. LPRs admitted as refugees and asylees were assumed to emigrate at 50 percent the rate of other LPRs each year. Substituting 25 percent for 50 percent has little numeric impact on either the overall estimates or on the estimates of LPRs from countries from which many refugees and asylees come (e.g., Cuba or Vietnam).

After adjusting for derivative citizenship, mortality, and emigration, the data 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 Status Obtained Prior to 1973

An estimate of this population was obtained from the Census Bureau's 2004 American Community Survey (ACS). It was assumed that all non-citizens in 2004 who entered the United States before 1973 were LPRs. Under the registry provisions of immigration law, aliens of good

moral character who are not deportable or removable and have lived in the United States continuously since January 1, 1972 are eligible for LPR status. Year of entry was assumed to represent the year of admission for permanent residence since most LPRs admitted before 1973 came directly from abroad.

The ACS data were tabulated by country of birth, state of residence, and year of entry. ACS data are not available for countries where estimates are based on small numbers of observations, but this omission should have little effect on the estimates for the leading countries shown in this report. In addition, LPRs who reported entering the United States before 1973 were excluded from the USCIS administrative data in order to avoid double counting of the pre-1973 population.

LPR Population Eligible to Naturalize

The estimated LPR population eligible to naturalize was calculated based on 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 in three years. There are several other exceptions to the five-year residency requirement, most of which affect small numbers of immigrants. However, immigrants eligible under these other provisions of immigration law cannot be identified until they naturalize.

It was therefore assumed that all LPRs are required to meet a five-year residency requirement except for those whose permanent residence 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 their lawful permanent resident status. Asylees were therefore assumed eligible to naturalize four years after approval of their adjustment of status application.

Refugees, Lautenberg parolees, and cancellation of removal immigrants 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 these earlier dates and the date of approval of the application for permanent residence so that these LPRs are eligible for naturalization approximately three years after approval of their application for adjustment.

FINDINGS

Overview

In September 2004, the estimated LPR population was 11.6 million and an estimated 8.0 million LPRs were eligible to naturalize (see Table 1). These estimates are slightly higher than the 2003 estimates of 11.4 million and 7.8 million, respectively.² The LPR population for 2004 (11.6 million) is consistent with an estimate of 11.7 million obtained by Jeffrey Passel (personal communication, 2005) derived from March Supplements to the Current Population Survey using methods described in Passel et al. (2004).

The entries in Table 2 show the contribution of each data source and adjustment to the final estimated LPR population in 2004. According to USCIS administrative records, 23.1 million foreign nationals became LPRs of the United States between 1973 and 2004. By 2004, that number had been reduced by one-half. Naturalizations accounted for 8.4 million (36 percent). An estimated 0.7 million (3 percent) had derived citizenship before

Table 1.
Estimated Size of the Legal Permanent Residence Population by Eligibility to Naturalize: 2003 to 2004
(in millions)

Legal permanent residents	2003	2004
Total	11.4	11.6
Eligible to naturalize	7.8	8.0
Not eligible to naturalize.....	3.6	3.6

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

²The 2003 estimates were revised downward by 0.1 million by the use of the ACS rather than the March Current Population Survey to estimate the pre-1973 LPR population.

Table 2.
Components of the Estimated Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2004

Category	Number (in millions)
LPR status obtained between 1973-2004	23.1
<i>minus</i> Naturalizations (N-400) 1973-2004.....	8.4
<i>minus</i> Derivative citizenship 1973-2004.....	0.7
<i>minus</i> Emigration and mortality 1973-2004	3.5
<i>equals</i> LPRs survived to 9/2004.....	10.6
<i>plus</i> LPR status obtained prior to 1973 (ACS).....	1.0
<i>equals</i> Estimated LPR population as of 9/2004.....	11.6
<i>minus</i> LPRs not eligible to naturalize as of 9/2004.....	3.6
<i>equals</i> Estimated LPR population eligible to naturalize as of 9/2004.....	8.0

Note: Column entries may not sum to total due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

Table 3.
Year of Admission for Permanent Residence of the Estimated Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2004

Year admitted	All legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number (in millions)	Percent	Number (in millions)	Percent
Total	11.6	100.0	8.0	100.0
Before 1960	0.2	1.9	0.2	2.7
1960 to 1969	0.5	4.4	0.5	6.4
1970 to 1979	0.9	7.6	0.9	11.0
1980 to 1989	1.7	14.8	1.7	21.6
1990 to 1999	4.2	36.4	4.1	52.0
2000 to 2003	3.3	28.4	0.5	6.3
2004	0.8	6.6	.	.

- Represents zero.

Note: Column entries may not sum to total due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

becoming 18 years old and 3.5 million (15 percent) had died or emigrated. An estimated 3.6 million LPRs in 2004 had not met the residency requirement for naturalization leaving 8.0 million LPRs eligible to naturalize.

The LPR populations grew only slightly between 2003 and 2004. The increase in new LPRs was nearly offset by the increase in naturalizations, derivative citizenship, emigration, and mortality and the decrease in the population that obtained LPR status prior to 1973 (see Table 1 of the 2003 estimates in Rytina, 2005).

The major sources of methodological error in the estimates are the assumptions made about emigration, mortality, and derivative citizenship. Errors in the estimate of these components affect the USCIS-based portion of the 2004 LPR estimate (10.6 million or 91 percent of the total 11.6 million). A 25 percent error in either direction in the estimate of these

components combined (0.7 for derivative citizenship + 3.5 for emigration and mortality = 4.2 million) would increase/decrease the total estimated LPR population by 1 million.

The estimates derived from the 2004 ACS (1.0 million or about 9 percent of the total 11.6 million) are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error.

The estimated sampling error at the 90 percent confidence level for a 1.0 million estimate is plus or minus 0.1 million.³ 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 nonsampling error include the possibility of misreporting of citizenship status and year of entry by ACS respondents.

³Calculated using technical documentation for the 2004 American Community Survey (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005).

Year LPR Status Obtained

The vast majority of the LPR population in 2004 obtained its current legal status during the current or previous decade (see Table 3). One-third (35 percent) gained permanent residence between 2000 and 2004. Seventy-one percent became LPRs in 1990 or later. Only 14 percent became LPRs before 1980.

Country of Birth

Estimates of the LPR population by country of birth are displayed in Table 4 for countries with at least 50,000 LPRs. Mexico was the leading country of origin. An estimated 3.1 million, or 27 percent, of LPRs came from Mexico. Other leading countries of birth included the Philippines, India, People's Republic of China, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Canada, El Salvador, Korea, and the United Kingdom. An estimated 56 percent of all LPRs in 2004 were born in these 10 countries. The 44 countries displayed in Table 4 represented 87 percent of the estimated LPR population in 2004.

In general, the size of the LPR population from a given country is affected by the level of immigration from that country as well as the propensity of LPRs from that country to naturalize. Mexico was the leading country of birth of the LPR population in 2004 because legal immigration from Mexico greatly exceeds that of any other sending country, and Mexicans have historically been among the least likely LPRs to naturalize. Among foreign nationals who became LPRs between 1973 and 1985, the overall naturalization rate through 2004 was 60 percent, but 70 percent for LPRs from Asian countries and 40 percent for LPRs from Mexico and European countries (Office of Immigration Statistics, unpublished tabulations, 2005).

The leading countries of origin of the LPR population eligible to naturalize are very similar to the total LPR population. The lower ranking for India among the LPR population eligible to naturalize partly reflects its relatively recent sizable LPR flows. India surpassed the People's Republic of China in 2001 as the second leading country of birth of legal immigrants behind Mexico (*2003 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 2004).

Table 4.

Country of Birth of Estimated Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2004

Country of birth ¹	All legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number (in millions)	Percent	Number (in millions)	Percent
Total	11.6	100.0	8.0	100.0
Mexico.....	3.1	26.5	2.4	29.8
Philippines.....	0.5	4.6	0.3	4.1
India	0.5	4.1	0.2	2.7
China, People's Republic.....	0.4	3.8	0.2	2.7
Dominican Republic.....	0.4	3.7	0.3	4.1
Vietnam.....	0.4	3.1	0.2	3.1
Canada.....	0.3	2.8	0.3	3.2
El Salvador.....	0.3	2.6	0.2	2.5
Korea.....	0.3	2.5	0.2	2.7
United Kingdom.....	0.3	2.4	0.2	2.8
Cuba.....	0.3	2.3	0.2	2.6
Jamaica.....	0.2	1.9	0.2	2.1
Haiti.....	0.2	1.8	0.1	1.6
Germany.....	0.2	1.6	0.2	1.9
Colombia.....	0.2	1.5	0.1	1.4
Poland.....	0.2	1.4	0.1	1.4
Guatemala.....	0.2	1.3	0.1	1.1
Japan.....	0.1	1.1	0.1	1.2
Russia.....	0.1	1.0	0.1	0.7
Pakistan.....	0.1	1.0	0.1	0.8
Peru.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.8
Ecuador.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.9
Ukraine.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.7
Iran.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.8
Nicaragua.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.7
Italy.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	1.2
Taiwan.....	0.1	0.8	0.1	0.7
Guyana.....	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.6
Bosnia-Herzegovina.....	0.1	0.7	-	0.5
Honduras.....	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.7
Trinidad and Tobago.....	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.7
Brazil.....	0.1	0.6	-	0.5
Laos.....	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.8
Thailand.....	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.7
Hong Kong.....	0.1	0.6	-	0.6
Nigeria.....	0.1	0.6	-	0.4
Ireland.....	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.7
Portugal.....	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.7
Cambodia.....	0.1	0.5	-	0.6
Bangladesh.....	0.1	0.5	-	0.3
Soviet Union (former).....	0.1	0.5	-	0.6
Ethiopia.....	0.1	0.4	-	0.3
France.....	0.1	0.4	-	0.5
Romania.....	0.1	0.4	-	0.4
Other.....	1.5	13.2	1.0	12.1
Unknown.....	-	0.2	-	0.2

- Value of figure is less than 50,000.

¹Countries with estimated legal permanent resident population of 50,000 or more.

Note: Column entries may not sum to total due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

Large numbers of Indian LPRs have either not met or just met the residency requirement for naturalization.

State of Residence

The data in Table 5 show the estimated LPR population by state of residence in 2004 for states with an estimated 50,000 or more LPRs. Because the data for most of the population are based on residence at the time LPR status was obtained, the relative rankings for most states are probably more accurate than the actual population estimates by state.

California and New York were the leading states of residence of the estimated LPR population in 2004. An estimated 3.3 million (29 percent) lived in California and 1.5 million (13 percent) lived in New York. Other leading states of residence of LPRs included Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois. These six states represented 68 percent of the total LPR population in 2004. The top 10 states, which also include Massachusetts, Washington, Virginia, and Maryland, accounted for 77 percent of the LPR population. The top states of residence of the estimated LPR population and population eligible to naturalize were generally the same.

NEXT STEPS

Estimates of the LPR population and the LPR population eligible to naturalize are updated annually by the Office of Immigration Statistics. The assumptions underlying the estimates will be re-evaluated and revised as appropriate.



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Table 5.

State of Residence of Estimated Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2004

State of residence ¹	All legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number (in millions)	Percent	Number (in millions)	Percent
Total.....	11.6	100.0	8.0	100.0
California.....	3.3	28.5	2.3	29.3
New York.....	1.5	12.9	1.1	13.6
Texas.....	1.1	9.4	0.8	9.9
Florida.....	0.9	8.1	0.6	7.8
New Jersey.....	0.6	4.8	0.4	4.4
Illinois.....	0.5	4.6	0.4	4.6
Massachusetts.....	0.3	2.6	0.2	2.5
Washington.....	0.2	2.0	0.2	2.0
Virginia.....	0.2	2.0	0.1	1.7
Maryland.....	0.2	1.8	0.1	1.6
Pennsylvania.....	0.2	1.8	0.1	1.7
Michigan.....	0.2	1.7	0.1	1.6
Arizona.....	0.2	1.7	0.1	1.8
Georgia.....	0.2	1.4	0.1	1.2
Connecticut.....	0.1	1.1	0.1	1.1
Ohio.....	0.1	1.1	0.1	1.1
Colorado.....	0.1	1.0	0.1	0.9
North Carolina.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.8
Oregon.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.9
Minnesota.....	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.7
Hawaii.....	0.1	0.8	0.1	0.9
Nevada.....	0.1	0.8	0.1	0.8
Puerto Rico.....	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.8
Missouri.....	0.1	0.5	-	0.5
Wisconsin.....	0.1	0.5	-	0.5
New Mexico.....	0.1	0.5	-	0.6
Indiana.....	0.1	0.5	-	0.4
Other.....	0.7	5.9	0.5	5.7
Unknown.....	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.8

- Value of figure is less than 50,000.

¹States with estimated legal permanent resident population of 50,000 or more.

Note: Column entries may not sum to total due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

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