

Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2012

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This report presents estimates of the legal permanent resident (LPR) population living in the United States on January 1, 2012. LPRs, also known as “green card” holders, are immigrants who have been granted lawful permanent residence in the United States but have not yet become U.S. citizens. Estimates of the total LPR population and the LPR population eligible to apply to naturalize are tabulated 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 2012 estimates is similar to that used in previous DHS estimates (see Rytina, 2012).

In summary, an estimated 13.3 million LPRs lived in the United States on January 1, 2012, and 8.8 million of them were eligible to naturalize. The majority (61 percent) obtained LPR status in 2000 or later.

BACKGROUND

Data on the size and characteristics of the foreign-born population are used to assess the impact of immigration in the United States. 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.

The LPR population estimates in this report were 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; Hoefler, 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 1980–2011 period. The two sets of estimates were added together to obtain the overall estimated population as of January 1, 2012.

Estimates for LPR Entrants Prior to 1980

All non-citizen residents of the United States in 2012 who entered before 1980 were assumed to be legal permanent residents. Under the registry provisions of immigration law, aliens are eligible for LPR status if they have lived in the United States continuously since January 1, 1972 and meet other basic requirements. 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. For the same reasons, DHS estimates of the unauthorized immigrant population assume that the foreign-born population entering the United States before 1980 is legally resident (see Baker and Rytina, forthcoming; Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker, 2012).



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Estimates of pre-1980 LPR entrants were obtained from data on non-citizen residents with a year of entry prior to 1980 from the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau. The data were tabulated by year of entry, country of birth, and state of residence.

Estimates for LPR Entrants from 1980 through 2011

Data on LPRs who entered the United States between January 1980 and December 2011 were obtained from case tracking systems of USCIS that contain information from applications for LPR status and naturalization. LPR status applicants living in the United States use the *Application to Adjust Status to Permanent Residence (I-485)*, whereas applicants living outside the United States use either the *Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration (DS-230)* or the *Electronic Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration (DS-260)* of the U.S. Department of State. I-485 applicants who become LPRs are referred to as “adjustments of status,” and DS-230 or DS-260 applicants who subsequently become LPRs are known as “new arrivals.” Naturalization applicants aged 18 and over use the *Application for Naturalization (N-400)*. 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 (LPR status applicants only).

LPRs who subsequently naturalized were excluded by matching individual LPR and naturalization records by A-number. Several adjustments were then made to reduce the aggregated total inflow of 1980–2011 LPR entrants to the population remaining after 2011. 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. In most cases, LPRs under 18 years of age automatically become U.S. citizens upon the naturalization of a parent. Although not required by law, those who derive citizenship through the naturalization of a parent may apply for a certificate documenting citizenship. The number of LPRs deriving citizenship was estimated from applications filed for certificates of citizenship from 1980 through 2011. Although this approach, like its predecessor,¹ produces a conservative estimate of derivative citi-

zenship, it is straightforward and produces a slightly larger and presumably more accurate estimate for recent years.

Mortality. LPRs were survived to 2012 by age (i.e., age when LPR status was obtained) and sex using mortality rates by age and sex from 1999–2001 life tables (Arias et al., 2008). The median age of foreign nationals at the time they become LPRs is about 31 years (Monger and Yankay, 2013). 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 1980–2011 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. Most LPRs are required to meet a five-year residency requirement for naturalization, with spouses of U.S. citizens 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.

This report estimates the LPR population eligible to naturalize based on residence requirements using class of admission and the year LPR status was obtained. All LPRs, except those whose LPR status was based on marriage to a U.S. citizen, were assumed to have a five-year residency requirement for naturalization. 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. For example, asylees are credited one year in asylum status toward lawful permanent resident status. Asylees were therefore assumed to be 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

¹For LPR population estimates for years prior to 2009, OIS assumed that the cumulative “citizenship” rate (derivative citizenship plus naturalization) for persons who were under 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.

apply for naturalization approximately three years after approval of their application for adjustment.

FINDINGS

Overview

An estimated 13.3 million legal permanent residents (LPRs) were living in the United States on January 1, 2012 (see Table 1). An estimated 8.8 million of the total 13.3 million were eligible to naturalize. Between January 2011 and January 2012, the total LPR population and LPR population eligible to naturalize increased by 1.8 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively. Over the long term, the size of the LPR population changes slowly 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	2010	2011	2012
Total	12,650,000	13,070,000	13,300,000
Eligible to naturalize	8,070,000	8,530,000	8,770,000
Not eligible to naturalize	4,580,000	4,540,000	4,530,000

Note: 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 2012. According to USCIS administrative records, 27.4 million foreign nationals obtained LPR status between 1980 and 2011. By the end of 2011, an estimated 10.8 million (39 percent) had naturalized; 1.3 million (5 percent) had derived citizenship before becoming 18 years old; and 3.5 million (13 percent) had died or emigrated. An estimated 4.5 million LPRs had not met the residency requirement for naturalization, leaving 8.8 million LPRs eligible to apply to naturalize in 2012.

Table 2.

Components of the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2012

Category	Number
LPR status obtained between 1980–2011	27,360,000
<i>minus</i> Naturalizations 1980–2011	10,790,000
<i>minus</i> Derivative citizenship 1980–2011	1,290,000
<i>minus</i> Emigration and mortality 1980–2011	3,510,000
<i>equals</i> LPRs survived to 1/1/2012	11,760,000
<i>plus</i> LPR status obtained prior to 1980 (ACS)	1,540,000
<i>equals</i> Estimated LPR population as of 1/1/2012	13,300,000
<i>minus</i> LPRs not eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2012	4,530,000
<i>equals</i> Estimated LPR population eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2012	8,770,000

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 1980–2011 entrants portion of the 2012 LPR estimate. The estimates derived from the 2011 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 1.5 million estimate is less than plus or minus 0.1 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). 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

Forty-six percent of the LPR population in 2012 obtained permanent residence in 2005 or later (see Table 3). Thirty-four percent gained LPR status between 1990 and 2004, and 19 percent became LPRs before 1990.

Table 3.

Year LPR Status Obtained for the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2012

Year	All legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	13,300,000	100.0	8,770,000	100.0
Before 1960	170,000	1.3	170,000	2.0
1960–1969	390,000	2.9	390,000	4.4
1970–1979	980,000	7.4	980,000	11.2
1980–1989	1,050,000	7.9	1,050,000	11.9
1990–1999	2,580,000	19.4	2,510,000	28.6
2000–2004	1,970,000	14.8	1,760,000	20.0
2005–2009	4,240,000	31.9	1,920,000	21.8
2010–2011	1,930,000	14.5	0	0.0

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 2012 (see Table 4). An estimated 3.3 million or 25 percent of LPRs came from Mexico. The next leading source countries were China (0.6 million) and the Philippines (0.6 million), followed by India (0.5 million) and the Dominican Republic (0.5 million). Forty-two percent of LPRs in 2012 were born in one of these five countries. The 10 leading countries of origin, which also include Cuba, Vietnam, El Salvador, Canada, 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 3.4 million LPRs in 2012. The next leading states of residence were New York (1.7 million), Texas (1.3 million), and Florida (1.3 million).

Table 4.**Country of Birth of Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2012**

Country of birth	Legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	13,300,000	100.0	8,770,000	100.0
Mexico	3,330,000	25.1	2,690,000	30.6
China, People's Republic	640,000	4.8	280,000	3.2
Philippines	590,000	4.4	340,000	3.8
India	540,000	4.1	240,000	2.7
Dominican Republic	490,000	3.7	310,000	3.5
Cuba	420,000	3.2	300,000	3.4
Vietnam	340,000	2.5	200,000	2.3
El Salvador	330,000	2.5	260,000	2.9
Canada	320,000	2.4	260,000	3.0
United Kingdom	290,000	2.2	240,000	2.7
Korea, South	290,000	2.2	180,000	2.0
Haiti	260,000	1.9	160,000	1.8
Jamaica	240,000	1.8	160,000	1.8
Colombia	240,000	1.8	140,000	1.6
Guatemala	190,000	1.5	130,000	1.5
Germany	180,000	1.4	150,000	1.7
Poland	150,000	1.1	110,000	1.3
Peru	140,000	1.1	80,000	0.9
Pakistan	140,000	1.1	60,000	0.7
Japan	140,000	1.0	110,000	1.3
Other	4,030,000	30.3	2,370,000	27.0

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: 2012**

State of residence	Legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	13,300,000	100.0	8,770,000	100.0
California	3,400,000	25.6	2,480,000	28.2
New York	1,660,000	12.5	1,050,000	12.0
Texas	1,310,000	9.9	930,000	10.6
Florida	1,290,000	9.7	830,000	9.4
New Jersey	610,000	4.6	370,000	4.2
Illinois	550,000	4.1	370,000	4.2
Massachusetts	340,000	2.5	200,000	2.3
Virginia	290,000	2.2	160,000	1.9
Washington	280,000	2.1	180,000	2.0
Arizona	260,000	1.9	180,000	2.0
Maryland	250,000	1.9	140,000	1.6
Pennsylvania	250,000	1.9	140,000	1.6
Georgia	250,000	1.9	140,000	1.6
Michigan	210,000	1.6	130,000	1.5
North Carolina	160,000	1.2	90,000	1.0
Connecticut	160,000	1.2	100,000	1.1
Ohio	150,000	1.1	90,000	1.0
Colorado	140,000	1.1	90,000	1.0
Minnesota	130,000	1.0	80,000	0.9
Nevada	130,000	1.0	90,000	1.0
Other	1,470,000	11.0	940,000	10.7

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

These four states were home to 58 percent of LPRs in 2012. 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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