

Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2006

NANCY RYTINA

This report presents estimates of the legal permanent resident (LPR) population living in the United States on January 1, 2006. The LPR population includes persons granted lawful permanent residence, e.g. “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 2006 estimates is similar to that used in previous DHS estimates (see Rytina, 2004, 2005, and 2006). Minor changes in assumptions, made to be consistent with DHS estimates of the unauthorized population, had little effect on the estimates.

In summary, an estimated 12.1 million LPRs lived in the United States on January 1, 2006. The LPR population remained relatively stable between 2004 and 2006 – increasing by 5 percent.

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; 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 1980-2005 period. The two sets of estimates were added together to obtain the overall estimated population as of January 1, 2006. The reference date for the estimates was changed from fiscal to calendar year beginning with the 2006 estimates to be consistent with the unauthorized population estimates produced by DHS. For purposes of comparison, this report also provides estimates for the total LPR population on January 1, 2004 and January 1, 2005.

Estimates for LPR Entrants Prior to 1980

It was assumed that all non-citizen residents of the United States in 2006 who entered before 1980 were legal permanent residents (LPRs). Under the registry provisions of immigration law, aliens of good moral character who are not removable and have lived in the United States continuously since January 1, 1972 are eligible for LPR status. Additionally, 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



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foreign-born population entering the United States before 1980 is legally resident (see Hoefler, Rygina, and Campbell, 2006 and 2007).

Estimates of the LPR population in 2006 that entered before 1980 were obtained from data from the 2005 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 entry (assumed to be the year that LPR status was obtained), country of birth, and state of residence.

Estimates for LPR Entrants 1980 through 2005

Data on LPRs who entered the United States between January 1980 and December 2005 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.

LPR records from January 1980 through December 2005 were matched by A-number with naturalization records during the same time period in order to exclude LPRs who subsequently naturalized. Several adjustments were then made to reduce this aggregated total of 1980-2005 LPRs to a 2006 LPR population of 1980-2005 entrants. LPRs who entered the United States before 1980 were also excluded as these persons were represented in the pre-1980 entrant population. The date of entry for “new arrival” LPRs is the date of approval for LPR status. The year of last entry prior to adjustment of status is considered the entry date for “adjustment of status” LPRs. Approximately 30 to 40 percent of adjustment of status records each year between 1997 and 2005 were missing a last entry date. In such cases, year of last entry was imputed 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 either by applying for naturalization when they are at least 18 years old (using the N-400 naturalization application) or, if they are under 18 years of age, by deriving citizenship upon the naturalization of their parents (one parent beginning in February, 2001). Foreign nationals who derive citizenship are not required to apply to USCIS for a certificate of citizenship reflecting their citizenship status. As a result, a complete count of LPRs who derive citizenship does not exist.

The extent of derivative citizenship is suggested from lower naturalization rates of foreign nationals who were under 16 years of

age as compared to 16 years of age or older when becoming LPRs. For purposes of estimating the LPR population, it was assumed that the cumulative “citizenship” rate (derivative citizenship plus naturalization) through 2005 of LPRs who were less than 16 years of age when they became LPRs was the same as the rate for those who were older when obtaining LPR status. (Substituting age 15 or age 17 had little effect on the final population estimates). The younger the age when LPR status is obtained the greater the likelihood of becoming a U.S. citizen by either naturalization or derivative citizenship.

Mortality. LPRs were survived to 2006 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. 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). It was also assumed that LPRs who entered as asylees and refugees do not emigrate. Previous LPR estimates by DHS assumed that asylees and refugees emigrated at one-half the rate of other LPRs. This change had little effect on the overall estimates.

After adjusting for derivative citizenship, mortality, and emigration, estimates for the 1980-2005 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.

FINDINGS

Overview

An estimated 12.1 million legal permanent residents (LPRs) were living in the United States on January 1, 2006 (see Table 1). Of the 12.1 million, an estimated 8.2 million were eligible to naturalize. Between January 2004 and 2006, the total LPR population grew by 5 percent. The population eligible to naturalize increased 4 percent. Stability in the size of the LPR population partly reflects offsetting impacts from increases in both the number of persons becoming LPRs each year and in the rate at which LPRs are naturalizing. The total number of persons obtaining LPR status was about 20 percent higher during 2004-2006 compared to 2001-2003 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2007). However, LPRs currently naturalize sooner than they did previously which reduces the size of the population. The proportion of LPRs who naturalize within the first 10 years after obtaining LPR status has increased from approximately one-third for the 1970s-1980s cohorts to one-half among the 1995 cohort (Baker, 2007).

Consistency with prior estimates. The estimated LPR population for January 2004 using the current methodology is 11.5 million. This number is 1 percent greater than the previously reported estimate of 11.4 million for September 2003 (Rytina, 2006) and 2 percent less than an estimate of 11.7 million for March 2004 obtained by Jeffrey Passel (personal communication, 2005) derived from March Supplements to the Current Population Survey using methods described in Passel et al. (2004). Similarly, the LPR estimate for January 2005 (11.8 million) based on the current methodology is 2 percent greater than the previously reported DHS estimate for September 2004 (11.6 million). These comparisons suggest that the change in methodology, implemented to ensure consistency with the unauthorized population estimates, had little impact on the LPR population estimates.

Components. The entries in Table 2 show the contribution of each data source and adjustment to the final estimated LPR population in 2006. According to USCIS administrative records, 20.6 million foreign nationals obtained LPR status between 1980 and 2005. By the end of 2005, that number had been reduced by one-half. Naturalizations accounted for 6.8 million (33 percent). An estimated

0.7 million (3 percent) had derived citizenship before becoming 18 years old, and 2.8 million (14 percent) had died or emigrated. An estimated 3.9 million LPRs in 2006 had not met the residency requirement for naturalization, leaving 8.3 million LPRs eligible to apply to naturalize.

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 1980-2005 entrants portion of the 2006 LPR estimate. The estimates derived from the 2005 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 a 1.9 million estimate is less than plus or minus 0.1 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006). 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.

Table 1.
Size of the Legal Permanent Resident Population
(in millions)

Legal permanent residents	2004	2005	2006
Total	11.5	11.8	12.1
Eligible to naturalize	7.9	8.1	8.2
Not eligible to naturalize	3.6	3.7	3.9

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 2.
Components of the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2006

Category	Number
LPR status obtained between 1980-2005	20,620,000
minus Naturalizations 1980-2005	6,840,000
minus Derivative citizenship 1980-2005	710,000
minus Emigration and mortality 1980-2005	2,810,000
equals LPRs survived to 1/1/2006	10,260,000
plus LPR status obtained prior to 1980 (ACS)	1,850,000
equals Estimated LPR population as of 1/1/2006	12,110,000
minus LPRs not eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2006	3,860,000
equals Estimated LPR population eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2006	8,250,000

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Year LPR Status Obtained

More than seven in ten LPRs in the United States in 2006 obtained permanent residence in 1990 or later (see Table 3). Two-fifths (43 percent) gained LPR status between 2000 and 2005. Only 15 percent became LPRs before 1980.

Country of Birth

Mexico was the leading country of origin of the LPR population in 2006 (see Table 4). An estimated 3.3 million or 27 percent of LPRs came from Mexico. The next leading source country was the

Philippines (0.5 million), followed by India (0.5 million), People's Republic of China (0.5 million), and the Dominican Republic (0.4 million). Forty-three percent of LPRs in 2006 were born in one of these five countries. The 10 leading countries of origin, which also include Vietnam, Canada, El Salvador, Cuba, and the United Kingdom, represented 56 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 2006. The next leading states of residence were New York (1.5 million), Texas (1.2 million), and Florida (1.0 million). These four states were home to almost 6 in 10 LPRs in 2006. The next leading states of residence were New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Washington, Virginia and Arizona. The 10 leading states represented 76 percent of the LPR population. The top states of residence of the estimated LPR population and population eligible to naturalize were generally the same.

Table 3.
Year LPR Status Obtained for the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2006

Year	All legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,110,000	100.0	8,250,000	100.0
Before 1960 . . .	210,000	1.7	210,000	2.5
1960 to 1969 . .	470,000	3.9	470,000	5.7
1970 to 1979 . .	1,170,000	9.7	1,170,000	14.2
1980 to 1989 . .	1,410,000	11.6	1,410,000	17.1
1990 to 1999 . .	3,680,000	30.4	3,680,000	44.6
2000 to 2003 . .	3,060,000	25.3	1,320,000	16.0
2004 to 2005 . .	2,110,000	17.4	.	.

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

NEXT STEPS

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

Table 4.
Country of Birth of Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2006

Country of birth	Legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,110,000	100.0	8,250,000	100.0
Mexico	3,310,000	27.3	2,650,000	32.1
Philippines	540,000	4.5	310,000	3.8
India	510,000	4.2	200,000	2.4
China, People's Republic	460,000	3.8	210,000	2.5
Dominican Republic	430,000	3.6	310,000	3.8
Vietnam	340,000	2.8	220,000	2.7
Canada	330,000	2.7	260,000	3.2
El Salvador	320,000	2.6	220,000	2.7
Cuba	310,000	2.6	230,000	2.8
United Kingdom	290,000	2.4	230,000	2.8
Korea	270,000	2.2	180,000	2.2
Jamaica	220,000	1.8	160,000	1.9
Haiti	220,000	1.8	140,000	1.7
Colombia	190,000	1.6	110,000	1.3
Germany	190,000	1.6	160,000	1.9
Guatemala	170,000	1.4	110,000	1.3
Poland	160,000	1.3	110,000	1.3
Japan	130,000	1.1	100,000	1.2
Russia	130,000	1.1	60,000	0.7
Ukraine	120,000	1.0	60,000	0.7
Other	3,480,000	28.7	2,190,000	26.5

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: 2006

State of residence	Legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,110,000	100.0	8,250,000	100.0
California	3,430,000	28.3	2,490,000	30.2
New York	1,490,000	12.3	1,030,000	12.5
Texas	1,160,000	9.6	840,000	10.2
Florida	1,040,000	8.6	680,000	8.2
New Jersey	570,000	4.7	350,000	4.2
Illinois	550,000	4.5	370,000	4.5
Massachusetts . .	300,000	2.5	190,000	2.3
Washington	250,000	2.1	170,000	2.1
Virginia	240,000	2.0	140,000	1.7
Arizona	220,000	1.8	150,000	1.8
Pennsylvania . . .	210,000	1.7	130,000	1.6
Maryland	210,000	1.7	120,000	1.5
Michigan	200,000	1.7	130,000	1.6
Georgia	190,000	1.6	110,000	1.3
Connecticut	140,000	1.2	90,000	1.1
Ohio	130,000	1.1	80,000	1.0
Colorado	130,000	1.1	80,000	1.0
North Carolina . .	120,000	1.0	70,000	0.8
Oregon	110,000	0.9	80,000	1.0
Minnesota	110,000	0.9	60,000	0.7
Other	1,290,000	10.7	890,000	10.8

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

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