



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 26, 2014

U.S. Immigrant Population Hits Record 41.3 Million

Data released recently by the U.S. Census Bureau from its American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that the nation's immigrant population (legal and illegal) grew by 1.4 million from July 2010 to July 2013. This three-year growth brought the U.S. immigrant population to a record 41.3 million in July 2013, an increase of 1.4 million since July 2010. Since 2000 the immigrant population is up 10.2 million.



These figures were noted by the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) in its September report released this week.

The 41.3 million immigrants amounted to double the immigrant population in 1990, almost triple the number reported in 1980, and more than quadruple the number in 1970, when it was 9.6 million.

Having reached these levels in 2013, immigrants (both legal and illegal) comprised 13.1 percent of the U.S. population, which is the highest percentage in 93 years. As recently as 1980, immigrants made up only 6.2 percent of population.

As might be expected, Mexicans comprised the largest immigrant group in the United States, with 11.6 million legal and illegal immigrants living in the United States in 2013. However, the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States declined one percent between 2010 and 2013.

However, given the large amount of publicity about the surge of immigrants (including many unaccompanied children) from Central America, it is perhaps surprising to learn that the report shows the greatest number of immigrants coming not from Latin America, but elsewhere. The regions with the largest increases in the number of immigrants to the United States from 2010 to 2013 were South Asia (up 373,000, an increase of 16 percent); East Asia (up 365,000, an increase of five percent); the Caribbean (up 223,000, a six-percent increase), the Middle East (up 208,000, a 13-percent increase); and sub-Saharan Africa (up 177,000, a 13-percent increase).

"The new data make clear that while Latin America and the Caribbean are still a significant source of immigration, the growth is being driven in large part by immigration from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa," said Steven Camarota, director of research at CIS and lead author of the report.

The ACS makes no distinction between legal and illegal immigrants in this report, but those figures can be estimated from other available data. "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012," a report from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, notes that there were an estimated 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in January 2012 compared to 11.5 million in January 2011.

If we compare the two reports, we can arrive at an estimated figure of about 29.9 million legal immigrants and 11.5 million illegals. The figures show that 59 percent of illegal immigrants in 2012 were from Mexico. That compares with a figure of about 28 percent Mexicans when the figures of both reports are combined to reflect both legal and illegal immigrants.



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Most Americans are legitimately concerned about the massive rise in illegal immigration, which indicates a failure of our federal government to secure our borders and enforce our immigration laws. However, some may also worry that there is a limit to how many legal immigrants our country is capable of absorbing without suffering economic, political, and cultural consequences.

To put the figures into perspective, we can look back to the year 1900, during the heyday of the large migration of legal immigrants during the famed Ellis Island years. In that year, there were 10,341,276 foreign-born people in the United States out of a total population of 75,994,575. That represented 13.6 percent of our population. With the U.S. population being an estimated 317 million at the end of 2013, 41.3 million immigrants amounts to 13 percent, slightly lower than 1900. Yet, few would maintain that the United States in 1900 was overburdened by the immigrants, who more often than not were welcomed because they provided a valuable labor pool, building railroads and buildings and working in our nation's coal mines and steel mills.

The distinction lies not so much in the numbers, but in the vast changes in our economic and political structure since then. A century ago, immigrants had to choose between working or going hungry. Even their children often finished school after the eighth grade to go to work and help support their families. There were no federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or SNAP (food stamp) programs. Therefore, in most cases, the immigrant made a positive net contribution to the nation's economy. Culturally, recent immigrants did tend to congregate in urban neighborhoods with others of their own ethnic background, but their children learned English and soon moved out to assimilate among the rest of the population. And, in the process, they made valuable contributions that enriched American culture.

If the United States has difficulty today absorbing a 13-percent foreign-born population, it is because the creation of a near welfare state over the last century fosters dependence on government, burdening all taxpayers.

In an essay titled "What's Missing in the Current Immigration 'Crisis' Debate," former Rep. Ron Paul (known for his constitutionalist-libertarian philosophy) places the blame for the massive increase in immigration on several factors, including the U.S. drug war that has only exacerbated violence in the drug-producing countries of Latin American and prompted residents to flee to the U.S. border.

Paul discounts some libertarians who believe that there should be no limits on immigration, because our welfare-type society is too big a magnet that draws an unmanageable number of immigrants to our nation. He writes:

We live in a society where healthcare is provided — often by over-burdened emergency rooms that cannot legally turn away the sick — "free" education is provided, and other support via food stamp programs is also made available for "free" to illegal immigrants.

Paul also paints a picture of how the immigration problem would abate if the social welfare state were replaced with a free market:

In a free society where the warfare-welfare state ceased to exist, immigration laws would be far less important. A free market would seek workers rather than immigrants to add to its welfare rolls.

Of course, Paul's description is still hypothetical at this point, and those benefits he cites that draw so many legal and illegal immigrants remain in place. Under such circumstances, the 13-percent level of immigrants that our nation absorbed easily in 1900 may be far too high today. It might be the case that a moratorium even on most legal immigration may be necessary until our borders can be made secure



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and our economy put back on track and made into the free market it once was.

In the meantime, however, the only type of “immigration reform” that will stem the tide is enforcement of our present immigration laws.



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