



Population Estimates

LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT POPULATION
IN THE UNITED STATES: JANUARY 2015

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Estimates of the Lawful Permanent Resident Population in the United States: January 2015

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This report presents estimates of the lawful permanent resident (LPR) population living in the United States on January 1, 2015, and on the subpopulation eligible to apply to naturalize. 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 subpopulation 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 2015 estimates is similar to that used in previous DHS estimates (see Baker and Lee, 2017).

In summary, an estimated 13.2 million LPRs lived in the United States on January 1, 2015, 9.0 million of whom were eligible to naturalize. The majority of the population eligible to naturalize (65 percent), obtained LPR status before 2005.

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. In addition, DHS collects data measuring administrative events such as the number of aliens granted lawful permanent residence or the number approved for asylum. Yet DHS does not collect data on the population of LPRs or the population of asylees living in the United States at a point in time, and Congress discontinued an alien registration program requiring all legally resident aliens to report their status annually to the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1981. For these reasons, while Census and DHS data provide a wealth of information on the total foreign-born population broken down by citizenship and on annual migration flows and status changes, 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.

METHODOLOGY

The LPR population estimates in this report were derived primarily from Census Bureau 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; Hoefer, 1996). DHS has used a variant of this approach since 2002 to estimate the resident LPR population.

Separate population estimates were developed for LPRs who entered the United States before 1980 and during the 1980–2014 period. The two sets of estimates were added together to obtain the overall estimated population as of January 1, 2015.

Estimates for LPR Entrants Prior to 1980

All non-citizen residents of the United States in 2015 who entered before 1980 were assumed to be LPRs. 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, 2018).

Estimates of pre-1980 LPR entrants were obtained from data on non-citizen residents with a year of entry prior to 1980 from the 2014 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 2014

The LPR subpopulation who entered in 1980 or later and adjusted to LPR status by the end of 2014 was estimated by using LPR case records to calculate the total aggregated inflow since 1980. Several adjustments were then made to reduce the aggregated total inflow of 1980–2014 LPR entrants to the population remaining after 2014 by accounting for naturalizations, derivative citizenship, emigration, and mortality.

Total aggregated inflow. Data on LPRs who entered the United States in January 1980 or later and adjusted to LPR status by December 2014 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* (Form I-485), whereas applicants living outside the United States use either the *Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration* (Form DS-230) or the *Electronic Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration* (Form 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* (Form N-400). Basic applicant information maintained in the case tracking systems includes alien

identification number (A-number), date of birth, country of birth, sex, U.S. address, date LPR status or naturalization was obtained, and category of admission.

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.¹ For “adjustment of status” LPRs, however, the entry date after which these individuals would be considered to be residents is not recorded directly and the year of last entry prior to adjustment of status was selected as an approximation.²

Naturalizations. LPRs who subsequently naturalized were excluded by matching individual LPR and naturalization records by A-number. The data were also adjusted for derivative citizenship.

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 2014. Although this approach, like its predecessor,³ produces a conservative estimate of derivative citizenship,⁴ it is straightforward and produces a slightly larger and presumably more accurate estimate for recent years.

Mortality. The adjustments for mortality and emigration are methodologically the same as those used in DHS unauthorized immigrant population estimates. LPRs were survived to 2015 by sex and age at the time LPR status was obtained using mortality rates from 1999-2001 life tables (Arias et al., 2008). The median age of foreign nationals at the time they become LPRs is about 32 years (Baugh and Witsman, 2016). 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, but the U.S. Government has not collected official statistics since 1957, and national data that directly measure emigration do not exist. This report uses an emigration rate schedule 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 1980–2014 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, while spouses of U.S. citizens are generally subject to a three-year requirement. 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 residency 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 LPR 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 time in LPR 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, or 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 13.2 million LPRs were living in the United States on January 1, 2015 (Table 1). Of the total 13.2 million, an estimated 9.0 million were eligible to naturalize. The size of the LPR population changes slowly over time because increases in the number of persons becoming LPRs each year are offset by persons naturalizing.

¹ Aliens arriving at a port of entry with an immigrant visa issued by the U.S. Department of State are considered to be LPRs (i.e., to have obtained LPR status) immediately after inspection and admission by U.S. DHS Customs and Border Protection.

² Year of last entry was imputed where missing (approximately 40 percent of adjustment of status records during 1980-1981 and 1998-2005) using category of admission and year of LPR adjustment.

³ For 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.

⁴ Some derivative citizens may not request a certificate due to the high filing fee (currently \$1,170, compared to \$65 for a passport card, which also proves citizenship), while others may not even be aware of their derivative status. Thus the proportion of the derivative population who do not file, although unknown, is almost certainly larger than zero. The method used to estimate the number of derivative citizens will be revised in future editions of this report.

Table 1.**Lawful Permanent Resident Population by Eligibility to Naturalize: 2013 to 2015**

Lawful permanent residents	2013	2014	2015
Total	13,140,000	13,180,000	13,250,000
Eligible to naturalize	8,790,000	8,880,000	9,030,000
Not eligible to naturalize	4,350,000	4,290,000	4,220,000

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

Components. The entries in Table 2 show the data elements and adjustments to estimate the size of the LPR population in 2015. According to USCIS administrative records, 30.4 million foreign nationals who obtained LPR status before 2015 arrived in the United States between 1980 and 2014. By the end of 2014, an estimated 13.0 million (43 percent) of those had naturalized, 1.5 million (5 percent) had derived citizenship before becoming 18 years old, and 4.0 million (13 percent) had died or emigrated, thereby reducing the 2015 stock estimate of LPRs who arrived in 1980–2014 to 11.9 million. Adding 1.4 million LPRs who entered the United States before 1980 brings the total LPR estimate up to 13.2 million. Of those 13.2 million LPRs, an estimated 4.3 million had not met the residency requirement to apply for naturalization by the end of 2014, leaving 9.0 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 1980–2014 entrants portion of the 2015 LPR estimate. The estimates derived from the 2014 ACS for LPRs entering before

1980 are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. The margin of error at the 90 percent confidence level for the estimated 1.4 million LPRs who entered before 1980 is less than plus or minus 25,000. Estimates by country of birth and state of residence are based on smaller numbers of observations and are affected more by sampling error. Important sources of non-sampling error include possible misreporting of citizenship status and year of entry by ACS respondents.

Year LPR Status Obtained

Fifty-five percent of the LPR population as of 2015 obtained permanent residence in 2005 or later (Table 3). Among the subset of LPRs who were eligible to naturalize, 65 percent of the population gained LPR status before then.

Country of Birth

Mexico was the leading country of origin of the LPR population in 2015 (Table 4). An estimated 3.3 million or 25 percent of LPRs came from Mexico. The next leading source countries were China (0.7 million) and the Philippines (0.6 million), followed by India (0.6 million) and the Dominican Republic (0.5 million). Forty-two percent of LPRs in 2015 were born in one of these five countries. The 10 leading countries of origin, which also include Cuba, Vietnam, El Salvador, Canada, and South Korea, 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 reflect differences in the propensity to naturalize and variability in LPR flows.

Table 2.**Components of Estimation for the Lawful Permanent Resident Population: 2015**

Category	Number
Lawful permanent residents admitted between 1980-2014	30,360,000
<i>minus</i> Naturalization (N-400) 1980-2014	13,000,000
<i>minus</i> Derivative citizenship 1980-2014	1,510,000
<i>minus</i> Emigration and mortality 1980-2014	3,970,000
<i>equals</i> Lawful permanent residents survived to 1/1/2015	11,870,000
<i>plus</i> Lawful permanent residents admitted before 1980 (ACS)	1,370,000
<i>equals</i> Estimated lawful permanent resident population as of 1/1/2015	13,250,000
<i>minus</i> Lawful permanent residents not eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2015	4,220,000
<i>equals</i> Estimated lawful permanent resident population eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2015	9,030,000

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

Table 3.**Lawful Permanent Resident Population by Period of Admission and Eligibility to Naturalize: January 2015**

Year admitted	All LPRs		LPRs eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	13,250,000	100.0	9,030,000	100.0
Before 2000	4,490,000	33.9	4,470,000	49.5
2000-2004	1,510,000	11.4	1,400,000	15.5
2005-2009	2,870,000	21.7	2,580,000	28.5
2010-2014	4,380,000	33.1	590,000	6.5

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

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 the state of residence at the time LPR status was obtained (and does not account for subsequent state-to-state movement), the relative rankings are more reliable than the actual population estimates by state.

California was the leading state of residence with an estimated 3.3 million LPRs in 2015. The next

leading states of residence were New York (1.7 million), Texas (1.4 million), and Florida (1.3 million). These four states were home to an estimated 57 percent of LPRs in 2015. The next leading states of residence were New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Virginia, Washington, and Georgia. The 10 leading states represented 75 percent of the LPR population. The leading states of residence for the population eligible to naturalize were similar.

Table 4.**Lawful Permanent Resident Population by Country of Birth: 2015**

Country of birth	All LPRs		LPRs eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	13,250,000	100.0	9,030,000	100.0
Mexico	3,260,000	24.6	2,700,000	29.9
China, People's Republic	710,000	5.3	350,000	3.9
Philippines	580,000	4.4	350,000	3.9
India	580,000	4.4	270,000	2.9
Dominican Republic	490,000	3.7	310,000	3.4
Cuba	430,000	3.3	310,000	3.4
Vietnam	340,000	2.5	210,000	2.3
El Salvador	320,000	2.4	250,000	2.7
Canada	320,000	2.4	260,000	2.9
Korea, South	290,000	2.2	190,000	2.1
United Kingdom	280,000	2.1	230,000	2.5
Haiti	240,000	1.8	160,000	1.7
Jamaica	240,000	1.8	160,000	1.8
Colombia	220,000	1.7	140,000	1.6
Guatemala	180,000	1.4	130,000	1.4
Germany	170,000	1.3	150,000	1.7
Japan	140,000	1.1	120,000	1.4
Pakistan	140,000	1.1	70,000	0.8
Peru	140,000	1.0	90,000	1.0
Poland	130,000	1.0	100,000	1.2
Other	4,040,000	30.5	2,480,000	27.5

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

Table 5.**Lawful Permanent Resident Population by State of Residence: 2015**

Country of birth	All LPRs		LPRs eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	13,250,000	100.0	9,030,000	100.0
California	3,290,000	24.8	2,460,000	27.2
New York	1,660,000	12.6	1,070,000	11.9
Texas	1,360,000	10.3	980,000	10.9
Florida	1,260,000	9.5	850,000	9.4
New Jersey	600,000	4.5	370,000	4.2
Illinois	530,000	4.0	370,000	4.1
Massachusetts	340,000	2.5	210,000	2.3
Virginia	290,000	2.2	170,000	1.9
Washington	280,000	2.1	180,000	2.0
Georgia	260,000	2.0	160,000	1.8
Maryland	260,000	2.0	150,000	1.7
Arizona	260,000	1.9	190,000	2.1
Pennsylvania	260,000	1.9	150,000	1.7
Michigan	210,000	1.6	140,000	1.5
North Carolina	170,000	1.3	100,000	1.1
Connecticut	150,000	1.2	100,000	1.1
Ohio	150,000	1.1	90,000	1.0
Colorado	150,000	1.1	100,000	1.1
Nevada	140,000	1.0	100,000	1.1
Minnesota	130,000	1.0	80,000	0.8
Other	1,490,000	11.3	1,000,000	11.0

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

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