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Statistical Profile

A Demographic Portrait of Mexican-Origin Hispanics in the United States

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About this Report

This report examines the Hispanic population of Mexican origin in the United States by its nativity. Several data sources were used to compile the statistics shown in this report. The data for the demographic portrait tables are derived from the 2011 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS), which provides detailed geographic, demographic and economic characteristics for each group. Historical trends for the Mexican-origin and Mexican foreign-born population are based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) March Annual Social and Economic Supplement conducted for 1995 to 2012 and U.S. censuses from 1850 to 2010. Estimates of the unauthorized population are based on augmented data from the March supplement of the CPS.

This report was written by Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, research associate, and Mark Hugo Lopez, associate director. Paul Taylor provided comments and editorial guidance. Jeffrey Passel provided guidance on the report's statistical analysis. Anna Brown number-checked the report. Molly Rohal was the copy editor.

A Note on Terminology

The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably in this report.

"Native born" refers to persons who are U.S. citizens at birth, including those born in the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and those born abroad to parents at least one of whom was a U.S. citizen.

"Foreign born" refers to persons born outside of the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories to parents neither of whom was a U.S. citizen.

The following terms are used to describe immigrants and their status in the U.S. In some cases, they differ from official government definitions because of limitations in the available survey data.

"Legal permanent resident," "legal permanent resident alien," "legal immigrant" and "authorized migrant" refer to a citizen of another country who has been granted a visa that allows work and permanent residence in the U.S. For the analyses in this report, legal permanent residents include persons admitted as refugees or granted asylum.

“Naturalized citizen” refers to a legal permanent resident who has fulfilled the length of stay and other requirements to become a U.S. citizen and who has taken the oath of citizenship.

“Unauthorized migrant” refers to a citizen of another country who lives in the U.S. without a currently valid visa.

“Eligible immigrant” in this report, refers to a legal permanent resident who meets the length of stay qualifications to file a petition to become a citizen but has not yet naturalized.

“Legal temporary migrant” refers to a citizen of another country who has been granted a temporary visa that may or may not allow work and temporary residence in the U.S.

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Mexican-Origin Hispanics in the United States

A record 33.7 million Hispanics of Mexican origin resided in the United States in 2012, according to an analysis of Census Bureau data by Pew Research Center. This estimate includes 11.4 million immigrants born in Mexico and 22.3 million born in the U.S. who self-identified as Hispanics of Mexican origin.

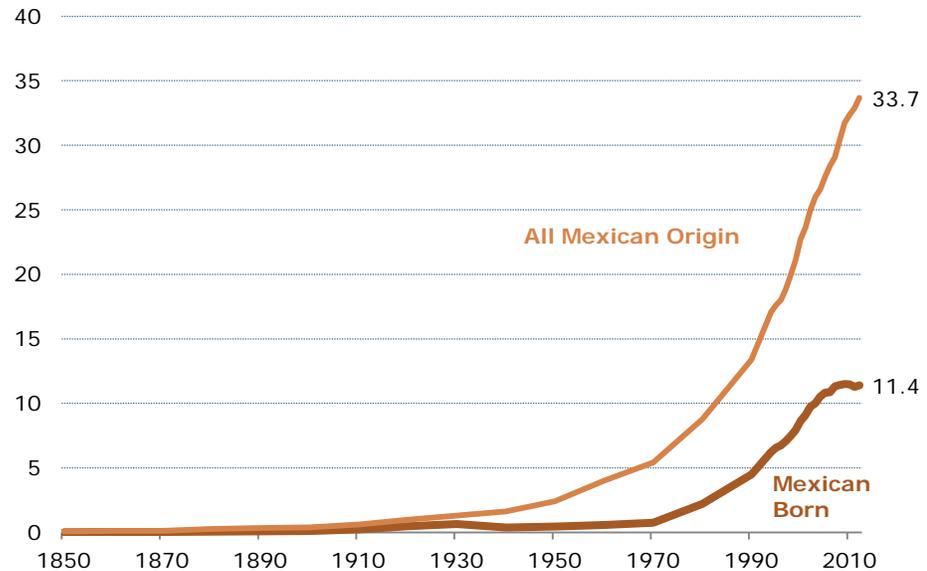
Mexicans are by far the largest Hispanic-origin population in the U.S., accounting for nearly two-thirds (64%) of the U.S. Hispanic population in 2012.¹ Hispanics of Mexican origin are also a significant portion of the U.S. population, accounting for 11% overall.

The size of the Mexican-origin population in the U.S. has risen dramatically over the past four decades as a result of one of the largest mass migrations in modern history. In 1970, fewer than 1 million Mexican immigrants lived in the U.S. By 2000, that number had grown to 9.8 million, and by 2007 it reached a peak of 12.5 million ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2011](#)). Since then, the Mexican-born population has declined as the arrival of new Mexican immigrants has

Figure 1

Mexican-Origin Population in the U.S., 1850-2012

(in millions)



Source: For Mexican born 1850 to 1980: Gibson, Campbell and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000," U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Working Paper No. 81, 2006; for Mexican born 1980 and 1990: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-USA); for 1995 to 2012: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on augmented March Current Population Surveys and 2000 Decennial Census. For Mexican population 1850-1994: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-USA); for 1995 to 2012: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on augmented March Current Population Surveys and 2000 Decennial Census.

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¹ Percentages are computed before numbers are rounded.

slowed significantly ([Passel et al., 2012](#)). Today, 35% of Hispanics of Mexican origin were born in Mexico. And while the remaining two-thirds (65%) were born in the U.S., half (52%) of them have at least one immigrant parent.

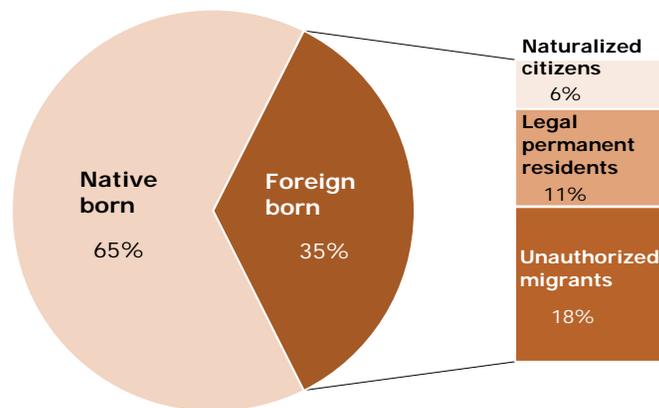
Prior to the 1980s, most of the growth in the nation's Mexican-origin population came from Hispanics of Mexican origin born in the U.S. However, since the 1980s—a decade after the current wave of Mexican migration took off—and up until 2000, more growth in the Mexican-origin population in the U.S. could be attributed to the arrival of Mexican immigrants. In the decade from 2000 to 2010, that pattern reversed—births surpassed immigration as the main driver of the dynamic growth in the U.S. Mexican-origin population ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2011](#)).

Mexican immigration has also played a large role in shaping the nation's immigrant population. Today, 11.4 million Mexican immigrants live in the U.S., making them the single largest country of origin group by far among the nation's 40 million immigrants. The next largest foreign-born population, from greater China at 2 million,² is less than one-fifth the size of the Mexican-born population in the U.S.

In addition, Mexican migration has shaped the nation's unauthorized immigrant population. More than half (55%) of the 11.1 million immigrants who are in the country illegally are from Mexico.

Among Mexican immigrants, half (51%) are in the U.S. illegally while about a third are legal

Figure 2
Nativity and Legal Status of Mexican-Origin Population in the U.S., 2011
(%)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on augmented March Current Population Survey 2011.

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² Greater China includes immigrants from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

permanent residents (32%) and 16% are naturalized U.S. citizens. Overall, naturalization rates among Mexican immigrants who are in the country legally are just half that of legal immigrants from all other countries combined ([Gonzalez-Barrera et al., 2013](#)).

Internationally, the U.S. is far and away the top destination for immigrants from Mexico. Fully 96% of Mexicans who leave Mexico migrate to the U.S. ([Connor et al., 2012](#)) Worldwide, 9% of people born in Mexico live in the U.S.³ In addition, the U.S. has more immigrants from Mexico alone than any other country has immigrants.⁴

Mexican Immigrants Today and Two Decades Ago

The characteristics of Mexican immigrants have changed over the decades. Compared with 1990, Mexican immigrants in 2011 were less likely to be male (53% vs. 55%), considerably older (median age of 38 vs. 29), better educated (41% with high school or more vs. 25%), and have been in the U.S. for longer (71% had been in the U.S. for more than 10 years, compared with 50%).

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Mexican Immigrants, 1990 and 2011

(% unless otherwise noted)

	Year		Change 1990-2011
	1990	2011	
Total			
(in millions)	4.4	11.7	7.2
Gender			
Male	55	53	-2
Female	45	47	2
Age			
Median (in years)	29	38	9
Age Groups			
Younger than 18	15	7	-8
18 to 29	35	21	-14
30 to 39	24	27	3
40 to 49	13	22	10
50 to 64	9	16	8
65 or older	5	7	2
Marital Status			
Married	59	58	-1
Never married	30	29	-1
Divorced/separated/widowed	10	13	3
Education Attainment (ages 25 and older)			
Less than high school diploma	75	59	-16
High school diploma	12	24	12
Some college or more	13	17	4
Household Income			
Median (in 2012 dollars)	\$38,600	\$34,000	-\$4,600
Median Annual Personal Earnings (in 2012 dollars)			
Employed (ages 16 and older)	\$17,900	\$20,000	\$2,100
Years in the U.S.			
5 years or less	30	11	-19
6 to 10 years	20	17	-3
11 to 20 years	31	33	2
More than 20 years	19	39	20

Note: All numbers and percentages are rounded after changes or shares have been computed.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of 1990 Census and 2011 American Community Survey data.

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³ The share of people born in Mexico who currently live in the U.S. was obtained by dividing the number of Mexican immigrants currently in the U.S. by the current population of Mexico (see www.inegi.gob.mx) and those who live in the U.S. currently.

⁴ Russia has 12.3 million residents who are classified as immigrants by the United Nations, but the vast majority were born in countries that had been part of the Soviet Union prior to its breakup in 1991.

On economic measures, Mexican immigrants have mixed results. Although median personal earnings increased by about \$2,000 during the last two decades, the median household income of Mexican immigrants suffered a drop of more than \$4,500. This reflects the effects of the recent economic recession that drove up unemployment rates in the nation, particularly among Mexican immigrants.

This demographic portrait compares the demographic, income and economic characteristics of the foreign-born and native-born Mexican-origin populations with the characteristics of all Hispanics in the U.S. It is based on tabulations from the 2011 American Community Survey by the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center. Key findings include:

- **Immigration status.** Almost two-thirds of Mexicans in the U.S. are native born (65%). About two-thirds of immigrants from Mexico (65%) arrived in the U.S. in 1990 or later.
- **Language.** Two-thirds (66%) of Mexican-origin Hispanics ages 5 and older speak English proficiently.⁵ The remaining 34% report speaking English less than very well, equal to the share among all Hispanics. About nine-in-ten (89%) native-born Mexicans ages 5 and older speak English proficiently. This compares to about one-in-three (29%) among Mexican immigrants.
- **Age.** Mexican-origin Hispanics are younger than both the U.S. population and Hispanics overall. The median age of Mexicans is 25; the median ages of the U.S. population and all Hispanics are 37 and 27, respectively. U.S.-born Mexicans are considerably younger than their foreign-born counterparts. The median age of native-born Mexicans is 17, compared with 38 of the foreign born.
- **Marital status.** Among those ages 15 and older, Mexican immigrants are more likely than native-born Mexicans to be married—58% vs. 34% respectively. As a group, Mexican-origin Hispanics ages 15 and older are slightly more likely (45%) to be married than Hispanics overall (43%).

⁵ This includes Mexicans ages 5 and older who report speaking only English at home or speaking English very well.

- **Fertility.** Almost one-in-ten (8%) Mexican women ages 15 to 44 gave birth in the 12 months prior to this survey. That was the same as the rate for all Hispanic women—8%—and slightly higher than the overall rate for U.S. women—6%. More than four-in-ten (45%) Mexican women ages 15 to 44 who gave birth in the 12 months prior to the survey were unmarried. That was similar to the rate for all Hispanic women—47%—and greater than the overall rate for U.S. women—38%.
- **Regional dispersion.** More than half (52%) of Mexican-origin Hispanics live in the West, mostly in California (36%), and another 35% live in the South, mostly in Texas (26%). There is no significant difference in the regional dispersion of Mexicans by nativity.
- **Educational attainment.** Mexicans have lower levels of education than the Hispanic population overall. Some 10% of Mexicans ages 25 and older—compared with 13% of all U.S. Hispanics—have obtained at least a bachelor’s degree. Mexicans born in the U.S. are almost three times more likely to have earned a bachelor’s degree than those born in Mexico—15% vs. 6% respectively. About six-in-ten Mexican immigrants have not earned a high school diploma (59%), compared with 21% of Mexicans born in the U.S.
- **Income.** The median annual personal earnings for Hispanics of Mexican origin ages 16 and older was \$20,000 in the year prior to the survey, the same as for U.S. Hispanics overall. U.S.-born Mexicans had higher earnings than their immigrant counterparts—a median of \$22,000 vs. \$19,000 respectively.
- **Poverty status.** The share of Mexicans who live in poverty, 27%, is slightly higher than the rate for Hispanics overall (25%). U.S.-born Mexicans are slightly less likely to live in poverty than their foreign-born counterparts—26% vs. 29% respectively.
- **Health insurance.** One-third of Mexicans (33%) do not have health insurance, compared with 30% of all Hispanics. More than half (57%) of Mexican immigrants are uninsured, compared with 20% of those born in the U.S.
- **Homeownership.** The rate of homeownership (49%) among Mexican-origin Hispanics is higher than the rate for all Hispanics (46%). The rate of homeownership among U.S.-born Mexicans (53%) is higher than that of Mexican immigrants (45%).

A Demographic Portrait of Mexican-Origin Hispanics in the United States

Demographics of the Mexican-Origin Population in the U.S., 2011

Thousands, unless otherwise noted

	Hispanics of Mexican Origin	Among Mexican-Origin Hispanics		All Hispanics
		Mexican Foreign Born	Mexican Native Born	
Total	33,539	11,651	21,888	51,927
Gender				
Male	17,209	6,211	10,999	26,336
Female	16,330	5,441	10,889	25,591
Age				
Median (in years)	25	38	17	27
Age Groups				
Younger than 5	3,608	47	3,561	5,141
5-17	8,534	795	7,738	12,245
18-29	6,954	2,449	4,505	10,665
30-39	5,296	3,091	2,205	8,160
40-49	4,146	2,597	1,549	6,762
50-64	3,443	1,905	1,538	6,013
65 and older	1,559	767	792	2,940
Marital Status (ages 15 and older)				
Married	10,520	6,423	4,097	16,154
Never married	9,592	3,226	6,366	15,417
Divorced/separated/widowed	3,129	1,454	1,675	5,671
Fertility (women ages 15 to 44)				
Total number of women	7,779	3,301	4,478	12,050
Women who had a birth in the past 12 months	637	314	323	932
Unmarried women ¹ who had a birth in the past 12 months	287	111	176	435
School Enrollment (ages 5 to 18)				
K-12	8,366	792	7,574	12,015
Educational Attainment (ages 25 and older)				
Less than high school diploma	7,280	5,704	1,576	10,383
High school diploma or equivalent	4,638	2,299	2,340	7,581
Some college	3,630	1,117	2,513	6,424
Bachelor's degree or more	1,659	531	1,128	3,759

Notes: Numbers may not sum to the total due to rounding. ¹ Unmarried women includes those who were never married, divorced or widowed. ²For detailed information on how poverty status is determined, see http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variables/POVERTY#description_tab. Due to the way in which the IPUMS assigns poverty values, these data will differ from those that might be provided by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2011 ACS (1% IPUMS sample). More information on the source data and sampling error is available at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/design.shtml> and http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf

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Demographics of the Mexican-Origin Population in the U.S., 2011 *continued...*

Thousands, unless otherwise noted

	Hispanics of Mexican Origin	Among Mexican-Origin Hispanics		All Hispanics
		Mexican Foreign Born	Mexican Native Born	
Median Annual Personal Earnings (in dollars)				
All (ages 16 and older with earnings)	\$20,000	\$19,000	\$22,000	\$20,000
Full-time, year-round workers	\$28,000	\$24,000	\$33,000	\$30,000
Persons in Poverty¹				
Younger than 18	4,330	418	3,912	5,894
18-64	4,477	2,751	1,726	6,755
65 and older	282	170	112	556
Health Insurance				
Uninsured, all ages	10,910	6,583	4,327	15,572
Uninsured, younger than 18	1,737	437	1,300	2,232
Persons in Households by Type of Household²				
In family households	30,492	10,493	19,999	46,317
In married-couple households	19,880	7,193	12,687	29,159
In non-family households	2,480	974	1,505	4,649
Language (ages 5 and older)				
Speaks only English at home	7,546	418	7,127	11,827
Does not speak only English at home	22,386	11,186	11,200	34,959
Speaks English very well	12,102	2,992	9,110	19,051
Speaks English less than very well	10,284	8,194	2,090	15,908
Year of Entry (foreign-born only)				
Before 1990	4,057	4,057	---	6,658
1990-1999	3,576	3,576	---	5,399
2000-2005	2,729	2,729	---	4,340
2006 or later	1,289	1,289	---	2,391
Regional Dispersion				
Northeast	933	476	457	7,186
Midwest	3,599	1,319	2,279	4,772
Illinois	1,654	706	949	2,078
South	11,654	3,895	7,759	18,820
Texas	8,570	2,505	6,065	9,794
West	17,353	5,961	11,392	21,149
California	11,950	4,276	7,675	14,358
Arizona	1,777	508	1,269	1,950
Colorado	830	234	596	1,071

Notes: Numbers may not sum to the total due to rounding. ¹ For detailed information on how poverty status is determined, see http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variables/POVERTY#description_tab. Due to the way in which the IPUMS assigns poverty values, these data will differ from those that might be provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. ² The household population excludes persons living in institutions, college dormitories and other group quarters.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2011 ACS (1% IPUMS sample). More information on the source data and sampling error is available at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/design.shtml> and http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf

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Household Characteristics of the Mexican-Origin Population in the U.S., 2011

Thousands, unless otherwise noted

	Hispanics of Mexican Origin	Among Mexican-Origin Hispanics		All Hispanics
		Mexican Foreign Born	Mexican Native Born	
Total	8,199	4,278	3,921	13,668
Homeownership (household heads)				
In owner-occupied homes (<i>in thousands</i>)	3,994	1,921	2,073	6,351
In renter-occupied homes (<i>in thousands</i>)	4,205	2,357	1,848	7,317
Homeownership rate (%)	48.7	44.9	52.9	46.5
Household Annual Income (<i>in dollars</i>)				
Median	\$38,000	\$34,000	\$44,000	\$39,000
Household Size				
Average number of persons	3.8	4.3	3.3	3.5

Note: The household population excludes persons living in institutions, college dormitories and other group quarters. Households are classified by the ethnicity of the household head. Numbers may not sum to the total due to rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2011 ACS (1% IPUMS sample). More information on the source data and sampling error is available at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/design.shtml> and http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf.

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Employment Characteristics of the Mexican-Origin Population in the U.S., 2011

Thousands, unless otherwise noted

	Hispanics of Mexican Origin	Among Mexican-Origin Hispanics		All Hispanics
		Mexican Foreign Born	Mexican Native Born	
Employment Status (civilians ages 16 and older)				
Employed	13,340	6,849	6,491	21,368
Unemployed	1,851	786	1,066	3,014
Not in labor force	7,368	3,364	4,004	11,847
Unemployment rate (%)	12.2	10.3	14.1	12.4
Industries¹				
Construction, agriculture and mining	2,093	1,551	542	2,799
Manufacturing	1,577	998	579	2,303
Trade and transportation	2,425	1,028	1,397	4,032
Information, finance and other services	7,245	3,273	3,972	12,233
Occupations¹				
Management, professional and related occupations	2,505	681	1,825	4,658
Services	3,242	2,055	1,187	5,138
Sales and office support	2,817	858	1,959	4,755
Construction, extraction and farming	1,868	1,437	431	2,485
Maintenance, production, transportation and material moving	2,907	1,818	1,089	4,332

Notes: Numbers may not sum to the total due to rounding. ¹Currently employed civilians ages 16 and older.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2011 ACS (1% IPUMS sample). More information on the source data and sampling error is available at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/design.shtml> and http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf.

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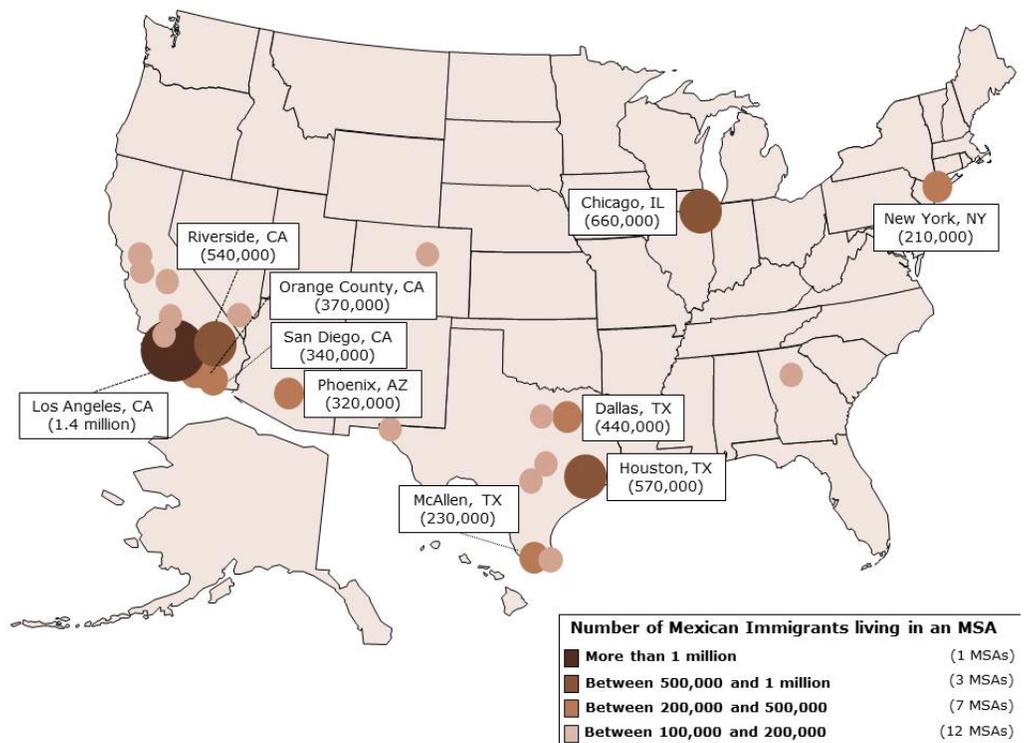
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Appendix A: Geographic Distribution of Mexican Immigrants in the U.S.

In 2011, 1.4 million, or about 12% of all Mexican immigrants, resided in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles, Calif. An additional half a million (5%) lived in the Riverside-San Bernardino metropolitan area, and about 300,000, or 3% of all Mexican immigrants, lived in each of the metropolitan areas of Orange County and San Diego. In addition, 6% of all Mexican immigrants lived in the metropolitan area of Chicago, Ill. About 13% of all Mexican immigrants resided in three Texas metropolitan areas—5% in Houston, 4% in Dallas and 2% in McAllen.

Figure A1

Location of Mexican-Born Population living in the Metropolitan Areas of the U.S., 2011



Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2011 ACS (1% IPUMS sample). More information on the source data and sampling error is available at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/design.shtml> and http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf

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Appendix B: Methodology

American Community Survey (ACS): 2011

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a continuously fielded survey that collects detailed information from a sample of the U.S. population on a wide range of social and demographic topics. Each month the ACS samples about 250,000 households. Interviews are conducted by mail and in person; follow-up interviews are conducted on a sample of initially non-responding households. The nominal sample size of the ACS is about 3.1 million households per year; about 2.1 million households are included in the final sample.⁶ The monthly samples do not overlap within five-year periods so that detailed information can be obtained for various geographic levels by combining samples across months.

Data from the ACS are released on an annual basis covering interviews conducted during calendar years. Information from a single year of ACS interviews is published for the nation, states, and “recognized legal, administrative, or statistical areas” with populations of 65,000 or more. Data for three consecutive calendar years are combined to provide tabulations for areas with populations of less than 20,000; data for five consecutive years provide information for all areas down to census tracts and block groups. The ACS began in 2005 with a sample of the household population and was expanded to full operational status in 2006 when the household and group quarters populations were included.

The ACS includes questions on place of birth (state or country), citizenship and residence one year before the interview. For people born outside the U.S., the ACS asks when the person came to live in the United States. These data items provide information on the foreign-born population in the U.S. and their movement to the U.S. ACS data presented in this report come from tabulations of microdata obtained from the Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series of the University of Minnesota ([IPUMS](#)). For each year, the microdata set represents a 1% sample of the U.S. population or about 3 million individual cases per year.

Like any survey, estimates from the ACS are subject to sampling error and (potentially) measurement error. Information on the ACS sampling strategy and associated error is available at http://www.census.gov/acs/www/methodology/methodology_main/. An example

⁶ For more information on ACS sample sizes and methods, see http://www.census.gov/acs/www/methodology/sample_size_data/index.php

of measurement error is that citizenship rates for the foreign born are estimated to be overstated in the decennial census and other official surveys, such as the ACS (see Jeffrey Passel. “[Growing Share of Immigrants Choosing Naturalization](#),” Pew Hispanic Center, Washington, D.C. (March 28, 2007)). Finally, estimates from the ACS may differ from the decennial census or other Census Bureau surveys due to differences in methodology and data collection procedures⁷.

Decennial Censuses: 1850 through 2000

U.S. decennial censuses from 1850 through 2000 have provided information on the foreign-born population via a question on place of birth. Through 1970, these censuses also asked mother’s country of birth and father’s country of birth, which permit identification of the second generation. Data on the Mexican-born population from 1850 through 1990 are from these census results presented by Gibson and Jung (2006) and in the *Historical Statistics of the United States* (U.S. Census Bureau, 1975). Data for 1980 through 2000 come from the 5% public-use sample of census records from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) to generate information on the foreign-born population. These sources also collect information on citizenship and year of entry to the U.S.

Data on the Mexican-origin population from 1850 through 2000 are based on Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of census records from the IPUMS.

Current Population Survey (CPS): 1995-2012

Monthly CPS

The Current Population Survey (CPS) is a monthly survey conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The CPS is a stratified probability sample of about 60,000 households designed to provide state-specific information on employment and unemployment (<http://www.census.gov/cps/methodology/>). Generally, about 50,000-55,000 households are interviewed. The sample has overlapping rotation groups in which each household is interviewed in four consecutive months, is out of the sample for eight months, and then returns to the sample for four more consecutive months.

⁷ See, for example, http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/methodology/ASA_nelson.pdf, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/laborfactsheet092209.html> and <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/datasources/factsheet.html>

The monthly CPS has a range of questions focused on labor force participation, but also collects information on demographic characteristics, education and immigration through questions on country of birth, parents' country of birth and citizenship (since 1994). The citizenship information identifies respondents as U.S. natives, U.S. citizens through naturalization and non-citizens (but with no further information on legal status). The latter two groups comprise the foreign-born population. For persons born outside the United States, the CPS asks when the individuals "came to live in the United States." All CPS cases are included in public-use microdata files, available from a variety of sources.

March Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC)

Each March, the basic CPS sample and questionnaire are expanded for the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC). The sample is augmented to about 80,000 households with a double sample of Hispanic households and oversampling of households with children and households headed by persons who are not white. The questionnaire is expanded to include questions about health insurance, detailed sources of income, program participation and residence the previous March. This makes the March ASEC supplement the main source of information on poverty and lack of health insurance. The question on residence one year prior to the survey date provides information on current migration into the United States. In this report, the March CPS is the principal data source on the size and characteristics of the unauthorized population (see below for estimation methodology).

The published information from the CPS and the CPS microdata use survey weights based on the most current information available to the Census Bureau at the time the survey is conducted. Because additional data on population change can become available and because of changes in the methods used to measure population change, the weights for the monthly CPS and the March supplements are not necessarily consistent across time. Consequently, comparisons of population numbers across different releases of the CPS can conflate actual population change with methodological changes. To minimize the impact of methodological change on comparisons across time, the Pew Hispanic Center has developed alternative weights for the March CPS supplements of 1995-2012 that use a consistent set of population estimates and permit more accurate comparisons over time. The methodology for developing the alternative weights is described below.

Method for Weighting CPS 1995-2012 Data

CPS population figures are based on the Census Bureau's official population estimates of the civilian, non-institutional population for the nation and states through a weighting process that ensures that the CPS figures agree with pre-specified national population totals by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin and with state-level totals by age, sex and race. The population estimates used to weight each March CPS are based on the latest available figures at the time the survey weights are estimated. Previous CPS weights are not revised to take into account updated population estimates.

This weighting process produces the best estimates available at the time of the survey, but does not guarantee that a time series produced across multiple CPSs is consistent or accurate. Significant discontinuities can be introduced when the Census Bureau changes its population estimation methods (as it did several times early in the 2000s and in 2007 and 2008) or when the entire estimates series is recalibrated to take into account the results of a new census (as in 2012 for the 2010 census and 2001 for the 2000 census).

The estimates shown for the Mexican-born and Mexican-origin populations in this report are derived from March CPS files for 1995-2011 that have been reweighted to take into account population estimates consistent with the 1990 census, the 2000 census, the 2010 census and the 2012 population estimates. The population estimates used to reweight the March 2011 CPS come from the Census Bureau's "Vintage 2011" population estimates (<http://www.census.gov/popest/data/index.html>); they are consistent with the 2010 census and the estimates used to weigh the March 2012 CPS. The population estimates used to reweight the March 2001 through March 2010 CPSs are the Census Bureau's intercensal population estimates for the 2000s (<http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/index.html>); these population estimates use demographic components of population change for 2000-2010 and are consistent with both the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Similarly, the population estimates used to reweight the March 1995 through March 2000 CPSs are the intercensal population estimates for the 1990s (<http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/index.html>), which are consistent with the 1990 and 2000 censuses.

The reweighting methodology follows, to the extent possible, the methods used by the Census Bureau in adjusting the sample weights to the population totals. A more detailed discussion of the methods can be found in the Methodological Appendix to Passel and Cohn, 2010 (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2010/09/01/us-unauthorized-immigration-flows-are-down-sharply-since-mid-decade/>) and in the Census Bureau's documentation of CPS weighting procedures (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/tp-66.pdf>).

Residual Method for Estimating Unauthorized Immigrant Population

The data presented in this report on unauthorized and legal immigrants from Mexico were developed with essentially the same methods used in previous Pew Hispanic Center reports ([Passel and Cohn 2010](#); [Passel and Cohn, 2009](#)). The national and state estimates use a multistage estimation process, principally using March Supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS).

The first stage in the estimation process uses CPS data as a basis for estimating the number of legal and unauthorized immigrants included in the survey and the total number in the country using a residual estimation methodology. This method compares an estimate of the number of immigrants residing legally in the country with the total number in the CPS; the difference is assumed to be the number of unauthorized immigrants in the CPS. The legal resident immigrant population is estimated by applying demographic methods to counts of legal admissions covering the period from 1980 to the present obtained from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics and its predecessor at the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The initial estimates here are calculated separately for age-gender groups in six states (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois and New Jersey) and the balance of the country; within these areas the estimates are further subdivided into immigrant populations from 35 countries or groups of countries by period of arrival in the United States. Variants of the residual method have been widely used and are generally accepted as the best current estimates. See also Passel and Cohn ([2011](#), [2010](#), [2008](#)) and Passel ([2007](#)) for more details.

Then, having estimated the number of legal and unauthorized immigrants in the March CPS Supplements, we assign individual foreign-born respondents in the survey a specific status (one option being unauthorized immigrant) based on the individual's demographic, social, economic, geographic and family characteristics. The data and methods for the overall process were developed initially at the Urban Institute by Passel and Clark ([1998](#)) and were extended by work of Passel, Van Hook and Bean ([2004](#)) and by subsequent work at the Pew Hispanic Center.

The final step adjusts the estimates of legal and unauthorized immigrants counted in the survey for omissions. The basic information on coverage is drawn principally from comparisons with Mexican data, U.S. mortality data and specialized surveys conducted at the time of the 2000 census (Bean et al. 1998; [Capps et al. 2002](#); Marcelli and Ong 2002). These adjustments increase the estimate of the legal foreign-born population, generally by 1% to 3%,

and the unauthorized immigrant population by 10% to 15%. The individual survey weights are adjusted to account for immigrants missing from the survey