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Rise, Peak and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992 – 2004

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The number of migrants coming to the United States each year, legally and illegally, grew very rapidly starting in the mid-1990s, hit a peak at the end of the decade, and then declined substantially after 2001. By 2004, the annual inflow of foreign-born persons was down 24% from its all-time high in 2000, according to the Pew Hispanic Center analysis of multiple datasets collected by the Census Bureau and other government agencies.

Rather than undergoing a continuous increase in immigrant levels as is commonly perceived, the United States experienced a sharp spike in immigration flows over the past decade that had a distinct beginning, middle and end. From the early 1990s through the middle of the decade, slightly more than 1.1 million migrants came to the United States every year on average. In the peak years of 1999 and 2000, the annual inflow was about 35% higher, topping 1.5 million. By 2002 and 2003, the number coming to the country was back around the 1.1 million mark. This basic pattern of increase, peak and decline is evident for the foreign-born from every region of the world and for both legal and unauthorized migrants.

In 2004, migration bounced back to exceed 1.2 million. Whether or not this move portends further increases is impossible to predict. But even with this recent increase in migration, the most recent data show that immigration flows are at levels comparable with those of the mid-1990s and still significantly below the peak levels of 1999–2000.

Other Resources Pew Hispanic Center Reports on Immigration

The Pew Hispanic Center has published many reports on immigration since its inception. Of note are the reports on the undocumented population. Estimates of the Size and Characteristics of the Undocumented Population used the most current data available to calculate the size of the undocumented. The report Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics estimated the size and geographic dispersal of the undocumented population and offers a comprehensive portrait of that population that numbers over 11 million.

A series of reports on Mexican Migrants published this year broke new ground in the study of immigrant experience in the United States. The first report, Survey of Mexican Migrants, Part One: Attitudes about Immigration and Major Demographic Characteristics described the characteristics of this unique population. With the following report, Survey of Mexican Migrants,

Part Two, attitudes about voting in Mexican elections and the ties that the immigrants had to Mexico were examined.

The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth details the distinctive characteristics of the rapid population growth of Latinos moving into the South. The report provides detailed demographic and economic data on six states: Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Latino Labor Report, 2004: More Jobs for New Immigrants but at Lower Wages and Latino Labor Report, 2003: Strong but Uneven Gains in Employment analyze the characteristics of the Latino labor force, comprised mostly of recently arrived immigrants.

In the most recent survey of U.S. Latinos and Mexicans, Attitudes toward Immigrants and Immigration Policy: Surveys among Latinos in the U.S. and in Mexico, U.S. Latinos report views that are not unanimous on unauthorized migrants and U.S. policy toward them. A separate survey in Mexico reveals the size of the Mexican population that is considering migration to the United States, including those inclined to come without legal status.

Federal Immigration Data Sources

The Census Bureau publishes yearly reports on the foreign born, with the most recent data showing that 53% of the foreign born come from Latin America. The Office of Immigration Statistics, which is a part of Department of Homeland Security, publishes yearly reports on refugees, naturalized citizens, and permanent legal citizens. The Division of Immigration of Policy and Research, at the Department of Labor, has a listing of reports that analyze the effects of immigration on the labor force.

Other Immigration Sources

The Mexican Migration Project is a multidisciplinary research effort between investigators in Mexico and the United States that study the Mexican immigrant experience. The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) is a research and policy analysis organization that focuses on the impact of immigration on the United States. CIS publishes reports on legal immigration and illegal immigration. The Migration Dialogue provides nonpartisan information and analysis of international migration. The Center for Migration Studies publishes International Migration Review, a quarterly journal on migration issues. The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) is dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide and publishes reports on the Migration Information Source. The Urban Institute's Immigration Studies Program studies the impact of U.S. Immigration. Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of International Migration, focuses on all aspects of international migration. The Brookings Institution published several pieces on immigration in the U.S. and has links to other research. The National Conference of State Legislatures' Immigrant Policy Project provides legislative research and analysis on immigration policy issues.