

Chaos and Complex Systems discussion

21 November 2023

Moderator: Terry Allard

Topic: **USA Immigration Trends and Policy Considerations**

Useful Source material: [PewResearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org), [USAfacts.org](https://www.usafacts.org)

Definition and Prevalence: "US immigrants" are citizens of other countries who have moved to the United States with the intention of residing permanently.

The US has more immigrants than any other country in the world. Just about every country in the world is represented. Immigration accounts for roughly half of yearly population growth in the US. In 2021, the total immigrant population was 45,270,103 people, accounting for about one-fifth of the world's migrants.

US Immigration Trends: Explosive Growth to Historic Levels (Figures 1 & 2)

U.S. immigration laws replaced a national quota system in 1965 quadrupling the number of US immigrants. Immigrants account for nearly 15% of the U.S. population, nearly triple the share (4.8%) counted in 1970. Roughly half of US immigrants are naturalized U.S. citizens. Another 29% are either permanent or temporary legal residents.

Most US immigrants come from Mexico and Asia (Figure 3)

Mexico is the top country of origin for the U.S. immigrant population. In 2018, roughly 11.2 million immigrants living in the U.S. originated in Mexico, accounting for 25% of all U.S. immigrants. The next largest countries were China (6%), India (6%), the Philippines (4%) and El Salvador (3%).

By region of birth, immigrants from Asia combined accounted for 28% of all immigrants, slightly more than the share of immigrants from Mexico. Other regions make up smaller shares: Europe, Canada and other North America (13%), the Caribbean (10%), Central America (8%), South America (7%), the Middle East and North Africa (4%) and sub-Saharan Africa (5%). The share of Asian immigrants is projected to grow over the next few decades as a percentage of overall US immigration.

A steep increase in illegal / unauthorized immigrants peaked in 2007 (Figures 4 & 3)

The number of unauthorized immigrants in the US spiked from 3.5 million in 1990 to a peak of 12.2 million in 2007, a 3.5-fold increase. That number has currently stabilized around 10 million. Most immigrants are in the country legally. However, in 2021, 22% of immigrants in the US were unauthorized. The percentage of US workers that are illegal was roughly 5% between 2017 and 2021.

Current status of US Immigration? Visas decrease, Border crossings spike

- a. 79 million visas were granted in 2021, a decrease of 30.4% from the 1.22 million visas granted in 2020.
- b. In fiscal year 2021, border encounters peaked at 1.7 million, 3 times higher than in 2020.

Root Causes of US Immigration?

- a. Political instability and social unrest/ danger.
- c. Economic uncertainty and opportunity. Higher wages in US.
- d. Industries like agriculture and manufacturing attract migrant labor.
- e. Digital connectivity and social media increase awareness about life and work in the US.
- f. Family Reunification.
- g. Climate refugees.
- h. Variability in US Border Policies.

Perceived pro's and con's of US Immigration?

- a. Pro: Increased labor force for low wage and/or unskilled labor.
- b. Pro: Recruitment from global best and brightest fueling economic & technical innovation.
- c. Pro: Increased tax base for aging native population.
- d. Pro: Cultural diversity is a valid societal goal.
- e. Con: Increased competition for American jobs.
- f. Con: Increased reliance on social safety net and other government resources.
- g. Con: Perceived dilution or other modification of "European cultural values."

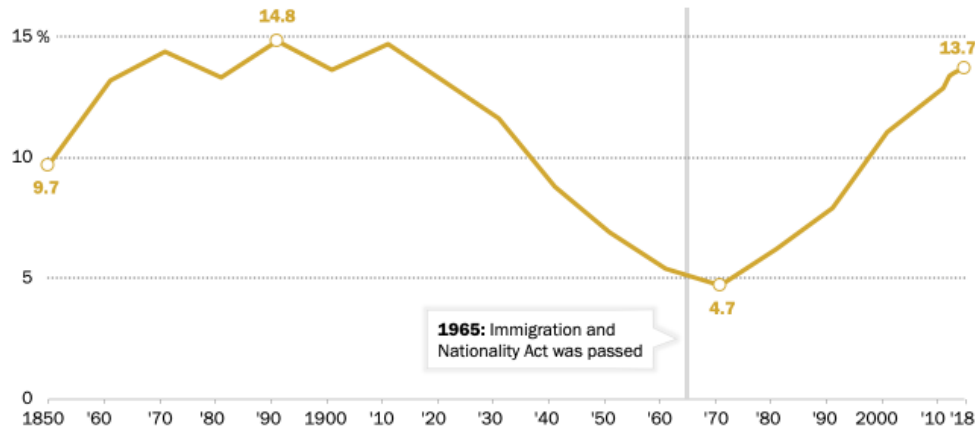
Immigration Policy Considerations: What's the right approach ???

- a. **Pathways to Legalization:** Establishing clear and accessible pathways for undocumented immigrants to attain legal status, fostering social integration. Congress has not acted on comprehensive immigration reform throwing policy to the courts and changing executive administrations.
- b. **Merit-Based System:** Enhancing employment-based immigration by implementing a merit-based system that considers skills, education, and contributions to the U.S. economy.
- c. **Humanitarian Policies:** Maintaining and improving programs for refugees and asylum seekers, addressing root causes of forced migration through diplomatic efforts.
- d. **Border Security:** Implementing effective border security measures to manage immigration flows and prevent illegal entry.
- e. **Family Reunification:** Preserving family reunification policies to maintain social cohesion and support immigrants' integration into American society.
- f. **Economic empowerment and political stability** in foreign countries.

FIGURES from Pew Research Center (PewResearch.org)

Immigrant share of U.S. population nears historic high

% of U.S. population that is foreign born



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000" and Pew Research Center tabulations of 2010-2018 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Figure 1.

Unauthorized immigrants were 22% of the U.S. foreign-born population in 2021

Foreign-born population estimates, 2021

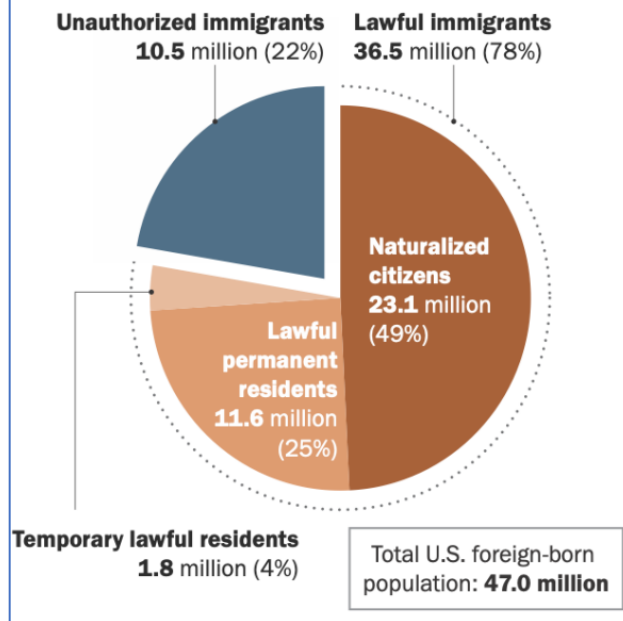
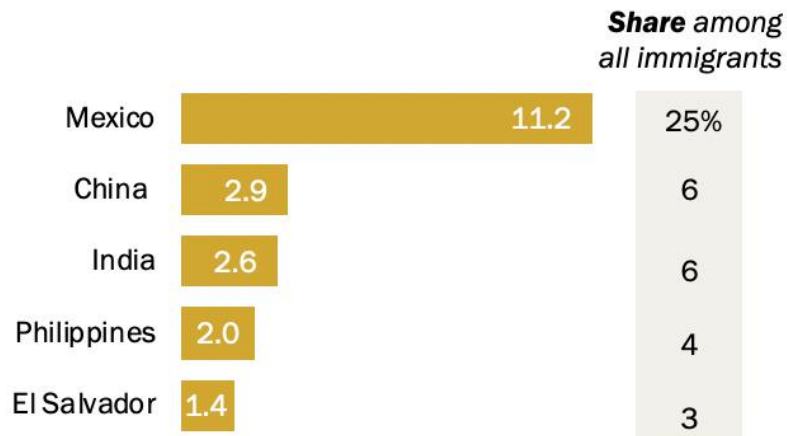


Figure 2.

Mexico, China and India are among top birthplaces for immigrants in the U.S.

Top five countries of birth for immigrants in the U.S. in 2018, in millions



Note: China includes Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mongolia.
 Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2018 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Figure 3.

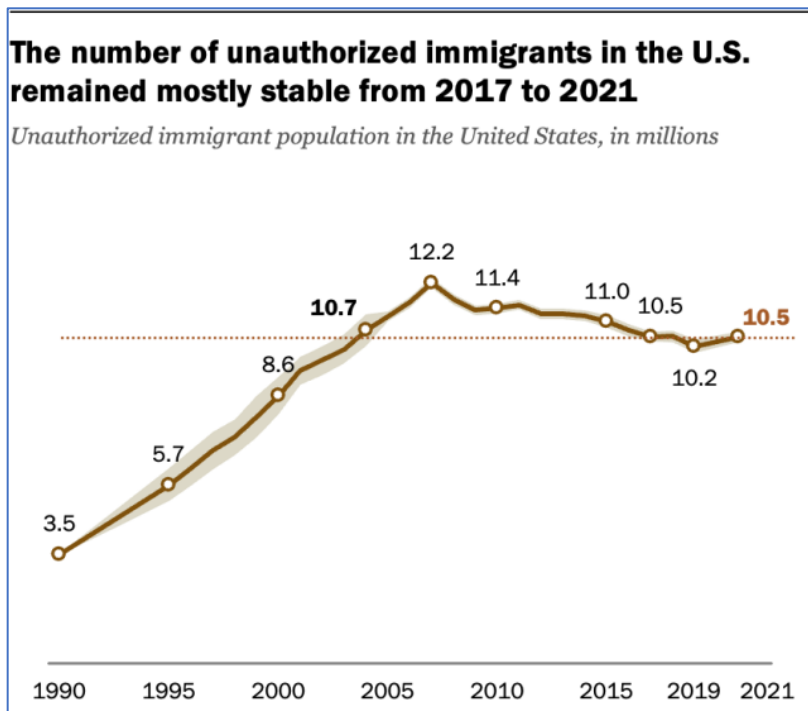


Figure 4.