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Unauthorized Immigrants: Length of Residency, Patterns of Parenthood

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About the Pew Hispanic Center

The Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve public understanding of the diverse Hispanic population in the United States and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. It does not take positions on policy issues. The Center is part of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" based in Washington, D.C., and it is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, a Philadelphia-based public charity. All of the Center's reports are available at www.pewhispanic.org.

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About this Report

This report focuses on the unauthorized immigrant population in the United States. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates the unauthorized immigrant population using the “residual method,” a well-developed and widely accepted technique that is based on official government data. For more details, see “[Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010](#)” by Jeffrey Passel and D’Vera Cohn (2011).

In this report, data come mainly from the March 2010 Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted jointly by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau. It is best known as the source for monthly unemployment statistics. Each March, the CPS sample size and questionnaire are expanded to produce additional data on the foreign-born population and other topics. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates make adjustments to the government data to compensate for undercounting of some groups, and therefore its population totals differ somewhat from the ones the government uses.

The report also uses the Pew Hispanic Center’s 2010 National Survey of Latinos (NSL). The survey was conducted August 17 through September 19, 2010, among a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of 1,375 Latino adults. The survey was conducted in both English and Spanish on cellular as well as landline telephones. For more details on the 2010 NSL methodology, see “[Latinos and the 2010 Elections: Strong Support for Democrats; Weak Voter Motivation](#)” by Mark Hugo Lopez (2010).

A Note on Terminology

The term “unauthorized immigrant” refers to immigrants who are in the United States illegally.

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

“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. “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.

The children of immigrant parents are native-born and foreign-born children under age 18 who have at least one parent that was born in another country. The children of U.S.-born parents are native-born children under age 18 who have two U.S.-born parents.

Unauthorized Immigrants: Length of Residency, Patterns of Parenthood

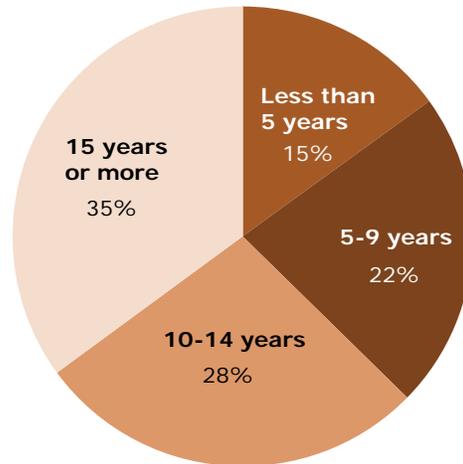
Nearly two-thirds of the 10.2 million unauthorized adult immigrants in the United States have lived in this country for at least 10 years and nearly half are parents of minor children, according to new estimates by the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center.

These estimates are based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2010 Current Population Survey, augmented with the Center's analysis of the demographic characteristics of the unauthorized immigrant population using a "residual estimation methodology"¹ that the Center has employed for many years.

The characteristics of this population have become a source of renewed interest in the wake of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich's recent endorsement of a proposal to create a path for unauthorized immigrants to gain legal status if they have lived in the country for a long period of time, have children in the U.S., pay taxes and belong to a church. Several of Gingrich's opponents for the Republican presidential nomination have criticized the proposal as a form of amnesty that would encourage more immigrants to come to the U.S. illegally.

The Pew Hispanic analysis finds that 35% of unauthorized adult immigrants have resided in the U.S. for 15 years or more; 28% for 10 to 14 years; 22% for 5 to 9 years; and 15% for less than five years.

Figure 1
Unauthorized Adults by Duration of Residence in the U.S., 2010



Note: Based on adults age 18 and older at the time of the survey.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the augmented March 2010 Current Population Survey; data adjusted for survey omissions

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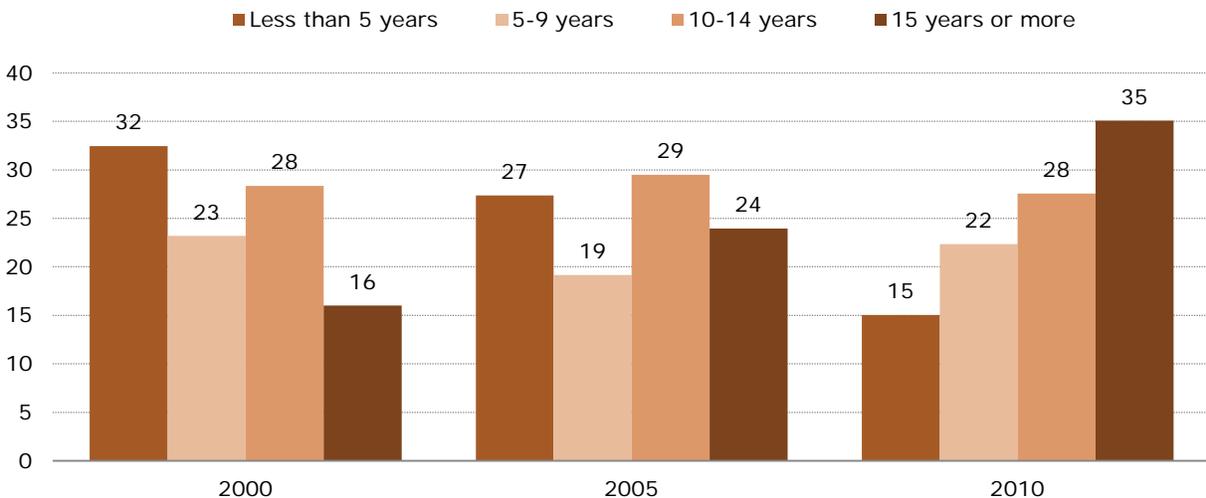
¹ The "residual estimation methodology" is explained briefly in the Appendix and more fully in Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn (2011), "Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010" at <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=133>.

The share that has been in the country at least 15 years has more than doubled since 2000, when about one-in-six (16%) unauthorized adult immigrants had lived here for that duration. By the same token, the share of unauthorized adult immigrants who have lived in the country for less than five years has fallen by half during this period—from 32% in 2000 to 15% in 2010.

The rising share of unauthorized immigrants who have been in the U.S. for a long duration reflects the fact that the sharpest growth in this population occurred during the late 1990s and early 2000s—and that the inflow has slowed down significantly in recent years, as the U.S. economy has sputtered and border enforcement has tightened. It also reflects the fact that relatively few long-duration unauthorized immigrants have returned to their countries of origin.

Figure 2

Unauthorized Adults by Duration of Residence in U.S., 2000, 2005 and 2010 (%)



Note: Based on adults age 18 and older at the time of the survey. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of augmented March Current Population Surveys; data adjusted for survey omissions

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Family Status

The Pew Hispanic analysis also finds that nearly half (46%) of unauthorized adult immigrants today—about 4.7 million people—are parents of minor children. By contrast, just 38% of legal immigrant adults and 29% of U.S.-born adults are parents of minor children.

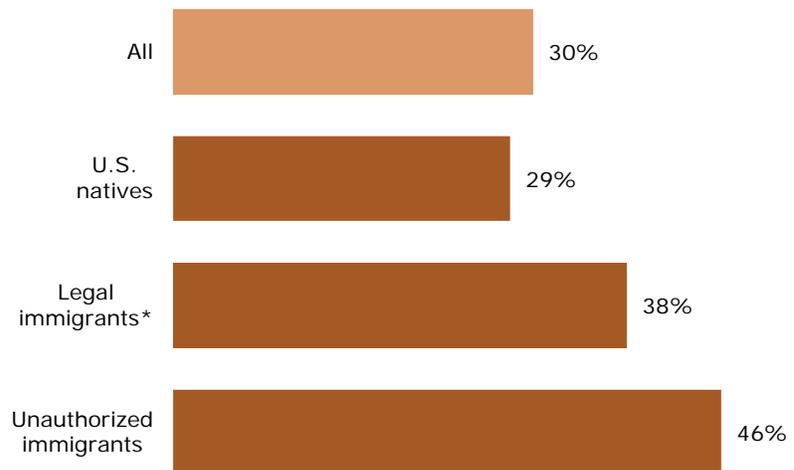
Much of this disparity results from the fact that unauthorized immigrants are younger than other groups of adults in the U.S. and more likely to be in their child-bearing and child-rearing years. The median age of unauthorized immigrant adults is 36.2 years old, which is about a decade

younger than the median age of legal immigrant adults (46.1) and U.S. native adults (46.5). The age variation accounts for 78% of the difference in the shares of unauthorized immigrants and U.S. natives who are parents.²

Unauthorized immigrants make up 28% of the country's foreign-born population and 3.7% of the overall population. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that a total of 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants, including people younger than 18, live in the U.S. This figure is lower than the 2007 peak of 12 million such immigrants. The recent decrease followed a two-decade period of growth, including a rise in the population from 8.4 million in 2000.

Figure 3

Share of Adults Who Are Parents of Minor Children, by Family Status and Legal Status, 2010



Notes: Parents of minor children include the family head and spouse of families with people younger than 18.

* Includes naturalized U.S. citizens

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the augmented March 2010 Current Population Survey; data adjusted for survey omissions

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² Of the 17.9-percentage-point difference between the number of parents with children in these two groups, 13.9 percentage points can be attributed to differences in age structure between populations. This figure is calculated by using a demographic technique called "age standardization." See [Das Gupta \(1993\)](#).

The decrease has occurred in part because of reduced flows into the U.S. among Mexicans, who constitute 58%—or 6.5 million—of the unauthorized immigrant population. About 150,000 unauthorized immigrants from Mexico came annually to the U.S. from March 2007 to March 2009, down 70% from the annual rates during the first half of the decade. As for outflow, the number of Mexican migrants who voluntarily return to Mexico has stayed somewhat steady, but removals (deportations) are on the rise. There were almost 390,000 removals (deportations) in fiscal 2010, or more than twice as many as in 2000, according to the Department of Homeland Security. About 73% of deportees in 2010 originally came from Mexico.

About 5 million unauthorized adult immigrants—49%—are in families with minor children.³ Along with the approximately 1 million unauthorized immigrants who are children, an additional 4.5 million people younger than 18 were born in the U.S. to at least one unauthorized immigrant parent. While the population of unauthorized immigrant children has decreased from a peak of 1.6 million in 2005, the number of U.S.-born children with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent has more than doubled since 2000.

Overall, at least 9 million people are in “mixed-status” families that include at least one unauthorized adult and at least one U.S.-born child. This makes up 54% of the 16.6 million people in families with at least one unauthorized immigrant. There are 400,000 unauthorized immigrant children in such families who have U.S.-born siblings.

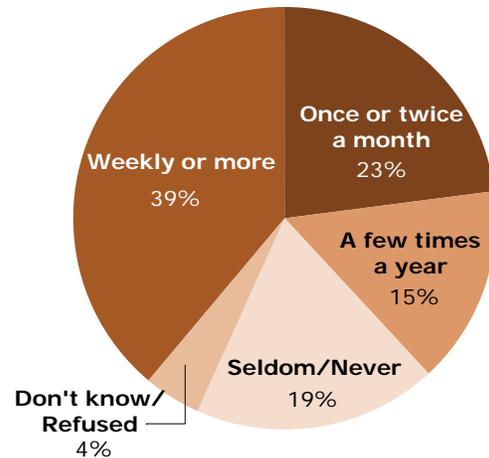
³ “Families” are defined as adults age 18 and older who live with their minor children (i.e., younger than 18) and unmarried, “dependent” children younger than 25.

Attendance at Religious Services

Additional details about the characteristics of Hispanic unauthorized immigrants—who comprise 81% of the unauthorized immigrant population—are available from the Pew Hispanic Center’s 2010 National Survey of Latinos, a nationwide survey of more than 1,300 Hispanic adults conducted from August 17 through September 19, 2010. The survey includes responses from Hispanic adults who say they are neither U.S. citizens nor legal residents—a group which closely aligns with the unauthorized immigrant population.⁴

According to the 2010 NSL, nearly four-in-ten (39%) Hispanic adults who are not citizens or legal permanent residents say they attend religious services weekly. An additional 23% say they attend services at least once or twice a month. And one-in-five (19%) say they attend services seldom or never.

Figure 4
Attendance at Religious Services Among Hispanics Who Are Not Citizens and Not Legal Permanent Residents, 2010



Source: 2010 Pew Hispanic Center National Survey of Latinos (N=263)

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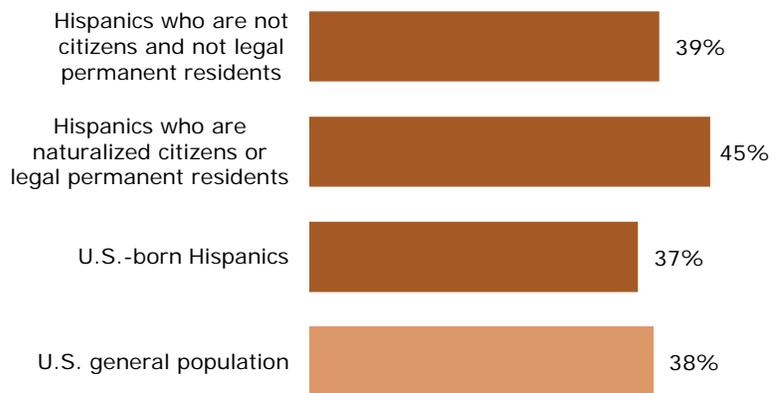
⁴ The Center’s analyses of CPS data indicate that approximately 98% of Hispanic immigrants who are neither citizens nor legal residents are unauthorized immigrants ([Livingston, 2009](#)).

Latinos who are not citizens or legal residents are not much different in how frequently they attend religious services when compared with other Latinos or the general U.S. population. Among foreign-born Latinos who are naturalized citizens or legal permanent residents, 45% attend religious services on at least a weekly basis. Among U.S.-born Latinos, 37% attend on at least a weekly basis. And among the general U.S. population, 38% attend religious services on at least a weekly basis.

Figure 5

Attendance at Religious Services by Citizenship and Legal Status, 2010

Attend religious services once a week or more



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2010 National Survey of Latinos (N=1,375); Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010 Annual Religion and Public Life Survey (N=3,003)

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Public Opinion on Immigration Policy

The 2010 NSL also explored public opinion among Latinos regarding immigration policy ([Lopez, Morin and Taylor, 2010](#)). According to the survey, Latinos who are not citizens or legal residents are supportive of a path to citizenship—91% favor providing a way for unauthorized immigrants to gain citizenship if they pay fines, have jobs and pass background checks. Among all Latinos, 86% support a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants, with these conditions. And among all Americans, 72% support a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants with these conditions ([Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2011](#)).

The 2010 NSL also found that among Latino adults who are not citizens or legal residents, 88% disapprove of workplace raids, 74% believe that the federal government should enforce the nation's immigration laws rather than local police, 71% disapprove of building more fences on the nation's borders, and nearly all (95%) disapprove of laws like Arizona's SB 1070 ([Lopez, Morin and Taylor, 2010](#)).

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Appendix A: Tables

Appendix Table 1

Attendance at Religious Services by Citizenship and Legal Status, 2010

(%)

	Hispanics			Native born	U.S. general population
	All	Foreign born			
		Not citizen or legal permanent resident	Naturalized citizen or legal permanent resident		
Weekly or more	40	39	45	37	38
Once or twice a month	19	23	19	17	14
A few times a year	20	15	17	25	20
Seldom/Never	20	19	18	21	26
Don't know/Refused	2	4	2	1	2

Note: Based on adults age 18 and older at the time of the survey. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2010 National Survey of Latinos (n=1,375); Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010 Annual Religion and Public Life Survey (n=3,003)

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Appendix B: Methodology

Unauthorized Immigrants—Overview

The data presented in this report on unauthorized and legal immigrants were developed with essentially the same methods used for previous reports (Passel and Cohn 2011, 2010). The estimates use a multistage estimation process, principally using March Supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a monthly survey of about 55,000 households conducted by the Census Bureau for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; the sample is expanded to about 80,000 households for the March supplement.

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, which are 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. For more details, see Passel and Cohn 2010 and Passel 2007.

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 (especially 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 1-3%, and the unauthorized immigrant population by 10-15%. The individual survey weights are adjusted to account for immigrants missing from the survey. These augmented files serve as a basis for the detailed tabulations of the family, social, economic and geographic characteristics presented here and in previous reports.