

BECOMING AN AMERICAN: THE RUSSIANS

**THE THIRD IN A SERIES OF EXAMINATIONS
OF ASSIMILATION AND LANGUAGE
LEARNING PATTERNS AMONG IMMIGRANTS**

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Becoming an American: The Russians
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Russia: The Nation

Spanning two continents, Russia is the largest country in the world and accounts for 6.6 million square miles of northern Asia and Europe. Twice the size of the continental United States, Russia borders 15 countries including Lithuania, Ukraine, and Poland in the west, Mongolia to the south, and China and North Korea to the southeast. Within Russia, more than 140 languages are spoken, yet its official language remains Russian; popular secondary languages include English, German, French, and Turkish.

East Slavs settled Russia between the third and eighth centuries and founded the Kievan State in the ninth century. After centuries of battle, the Mongols finally prevailed over the East Slavs in the 13th century.

Eventually the Moscow principality rose to dominance, marking the beginning of the Tsardom of Russia. In 1547, Ivan the Terrible started an era of violent rule and rapid expansion. In conquering new regions, Russia acquired a large Muslim Tartar population, requiring the state to become more tolerant of multiple religions and ethnicities. Following the death of Ivan IV, Russia endured times of trouble and chaos, marked by civil war and social disorganization.

The nation was eventually relieved from turmoil with the rise of the Romanov dynasty. After decades of peace treaties, expansion to the Pacific, and bureaucratic centralization under the Romanovs, autocracy was brought to Russia by Peter the Great. He revolutionized Russia into a modern Westernized state. Reforming the country included a shift of power by moving the capitol to St. Petersburg, subordinating the Church to the tsar, and altering the style of the military to that of European nations.

Though Russia was able to expand in Asia and Europe during the 19th century, the nation suffered a major defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. The losses in this conflict spurred a revolution in 1905 and prompted further emigration to the United States. Between 1880 and 1910, the number of Russian-born immigrants living in the United States surged from 35,000 to more than 1 million.

The Revolution of 1905 established a framework of democracy and civil liberties for the people, although ultimate power still rested with the tsar since he exercised control through veto. However, after the nation suffered devastating defeats in World War I, economic instability, periods of intense famine, and public restlessness, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne in 1917. The result was a bloody struggle for power between the White (anti-Communist) and the Red (Communist) army, the latter of which would emerge victorious. This was the beginning of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.).

Joseph Stalin gradually consolidated power in this new government. Under his leadership, Russia aggressively pursued economic growth – namely through collectivization and industrialization. Stalin also set up a vast bureaucracy and policing department.

Though it was extremely harsh and cost the lives of thousands, some parts of Stalin's plan did benefit the nation. Unemployment, which had plagued the country during the time of the tsar, was eliminated. Furthermore, after the initial five year period of aggressive economic development, the government pursued educational progress. During this time, significant gains were also made in the areas of women's rights, health care and immunization.

Unfortunately, life was not easy for many of the Russian people. The Russian government embarked on a frightening campaign against Russians of Baltic, Slavic, Turkic, east German, and Polish descent in the 1930s and 1940s. Additionally, those who were opposed to the government, or suspected to have been so, were tortured, imprisoned, or murdered without trial.

During World War II, Russia, along with the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, fought against Nazi Germany and the Axis powers. Approximately 25 million Russians lost their lives in the war, two-thirds of whom were civilians. After the war the U.S.S.R. looked to create spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, and engaged in a Cold War with the United States that would last well into the 1980s.

After Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev took control of the government and began loosening regulations. The USSR became slightly more open to contact with other countries and slightly more tolerant of government critique. There was a shift to commodity goods, which allowed the standard of living to rise dramatically. Khrushchev also put a strong emphasis on building Russia's missile forces, which would allow for a smaller manpower commitment and a larger labor force.

After a period of initial growth, the Russian economy eventually slowed due to a variety of structural problems. Industries were not quick to respond to changes in consumer tastes nor to invest in cost-saving technologies. Furthermore, the government had kept prices artificially low while steadily increasing wages, causing severe shortages.

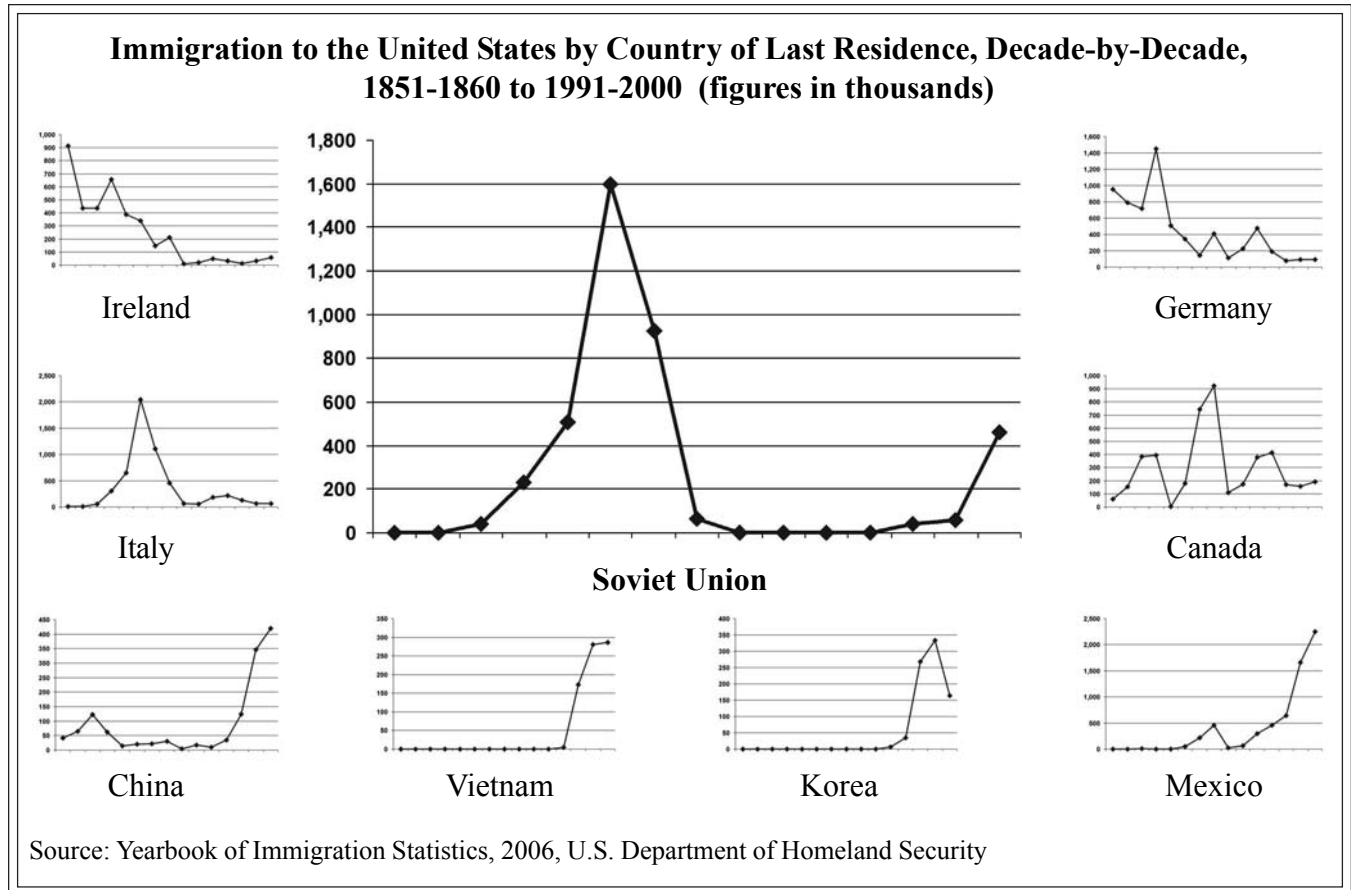
When Mikhail Gorbachev took the reins in 1985, Russia was struggling. There was hidden inflation, severe supply shortages, and a lack of technology compared to the West. Additionally, the price of maintaining a competitive military was staggering. By 1990, the 15 constituent republics of the U.S.S.R. were holding open elections, and by 1991, the U.S.S.R. was dismantled.

Boris Yeltsin was elected President in 1990. He cut subsidies to unprofitable farms and industries and abolished price controls, allowing for privatization of business. However, in the 1990s Russia experienced an unexpected shrinking of the economy. This led to several crises, including inflation and corruption.

Today, Russia remains powerful in politics. The country's economy has grown at a seven percent annual rate in the last decade thanks in part to investments, business and infrastructure development, and higher prices of natural resources. Though Russia currently has 140 million residents, there are significant questions about how the nation will care for a rapidly aging populace with little to no overall population growth.

Russian Immigration

While most immigrant groups in the United States have a single peak period of immigration, Russian immigration patterns are notable for the fact that the peak for arrivals came in two separate spurts with virtually no immigration in between.



As the chart demonstrates, the peak periods of Russian immigration occurred from 1881 to 1920 and then again from 1990 to the present. No other country has had two separate distinct peaks. The majority of German, Italian and Irish immigration occurred before World War I. The majority of Canadian immigration occurred from 1910-1930, while the majority of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigration has occurred since 1970.

Russia, however, was the second most common country of last residence for immigrants to the United States from 1891 to 1900, 1901 to 1910 and 1911 to 1920, and the third most common country of origin for immigrants from 1990 to 2000. The valley between these two peaks makes them even more distinct. For political reasons, the total number of Russian immigrants to the United States in the 40-year span from 1931-1970 was 5,077, less than one-tenth of what was recorded in the single year of 2001 and less than one-three hundredth of what was recorded in the decade of 1901-1910.

Most Common Nation of Last Residence for Immigrants to the United States, by Decade

<u>Decade</u>	<u>1st</u>	<u>Immigrants</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>Imm.</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>Imm.</u>	<u>Soviet Union</u>
1861-1870	Germany	787,468	U.K.	606,896	Ireland	435,778	2,512
1871-1880	Germany	718,182	U.K.	548,043	Ireland	436,871	39,284
1881-1890	Germany	1,452,970	U.K.	807,357	Ireland	655,482	213,282
1891-1900	Italy	651,893	Soviet Union	505,290	Germany	505,152	505,290
1901-1910	Italy	2,045,877	Soviet Union	1,597,306	Hungary	808,511	1,597,306
1911-1920	Italy	1,109,524	Soviet Union	921,201	Canada	742,185	921,201
1921-1930	Canada	924,515	Mexico	459,287	Italy	455,315	61,742
1931-1940	Germany	114,058	Canada	108,527	Italy	68,028	1,370
1941-1950	Germany	226,578	Canada	171,718	U.K.	139,306	571
1951-1960	Germany	477,765	Canada	377,952	Mexico	299,811	671
1961-1970	Mexico	453,937	Canada	413,310	Italy	214,111	2,465
1971-1980	Mexico	640,294	Philippines	354,987	Korea	267,638	38,961
1981-1990	Mexico	1,655,843	Philippines	548,764	China	346,747	57,677
1991-2000	Mexico	2,249,121	Philippines	503,945	Soviet Union	462,874	462,874

Because of the long gap in immigration, the Russian immigrant population of the United States is disproportionately new to the country. The 2000 Census found that more than seven-in-ten Russian immigrants living in the United States arrived between 1990 and 2000. This was substantially higher than any other major immigrant group, including Mexicans (48.4 percent arrived between 1990 and 2000), Chinese (46.7 percent), Koreans (36.7 percent) and Vietnamese (34.8 percent).

The 2000 Census found 340,177 Russian immigrants living in the United States. This figure cannot be correlated to immigration totals from 1980 and 1990, when Russian immigration was grouped together with the entire U.S.S.R. It bears noting that if immigrants from the former U.S.S.R. states were included, the combined number of immigrants would be 838,809 in 2000, vs. 333,725 in 1990 and 406,022 in 1980.

Immigrants from the U.S.S.R. and the former Soviet Republics living in the U.S., 1970-2000

	<u>2000</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1970</u>
Russia	340,177			
Ukraine	275,153			
Armenia	65,280			
Belarus	38,503			
Uzbekistan	23,029			
Moldova	19,507			
Azerbaijan	14,205			
Georgia	10,528			
Kazakhstan	9,154			
Kyrgyzstan	2,376			
Tajikistan	2,666			
Turmenistan	896			
<u>U.S.S.R.</u>	<u>37,336</u>	<u>333,725</u>	<u>406,022</u>	<u>463,462</u>
Total, former Soviet Union	838,809	333,725	406,022	463,462

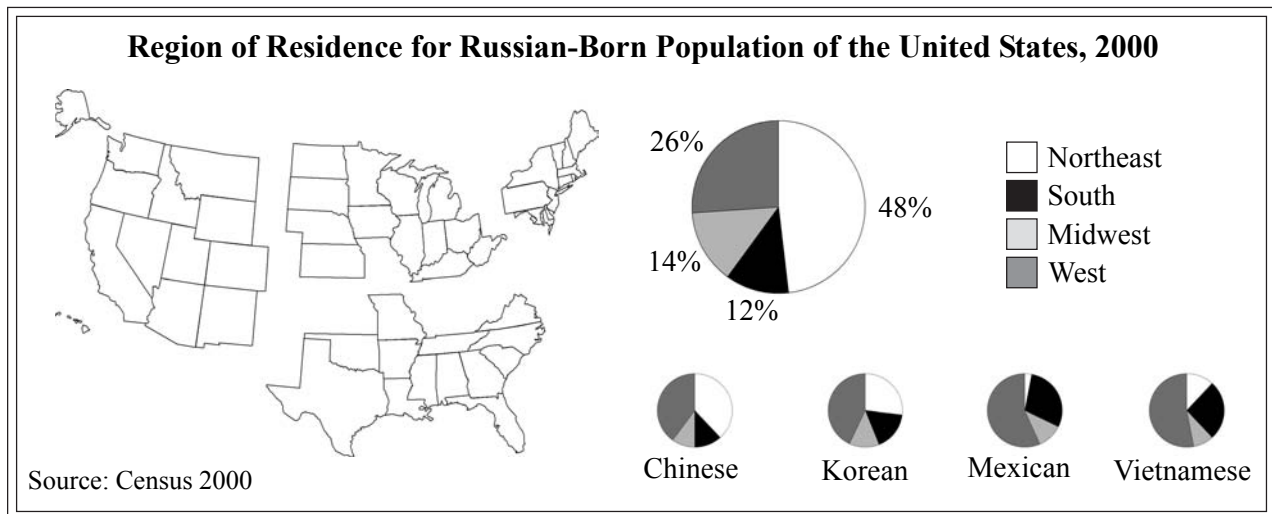
(Note: The Census question regarding country of birth is an open ended query. Despite the breakup of the U.S.S.R. in the 1990s, more than 37,000 Americans indicated "U.S.S.R." as their nation of birth in 2000.)

Settlement Patterns and Population Demographics

The earliest Russian immigration to what is now the United States began in the 1700s, when natives crossed the Bering Strait to settle in present-day Alaska, territory then owned by Russia. From these settlements, Russians ventured down the West Coast as far south as California. When Russia sold the Alaskan territory to the United States in 1867, many Russians living in the Alaska territory returned back to the mainland.

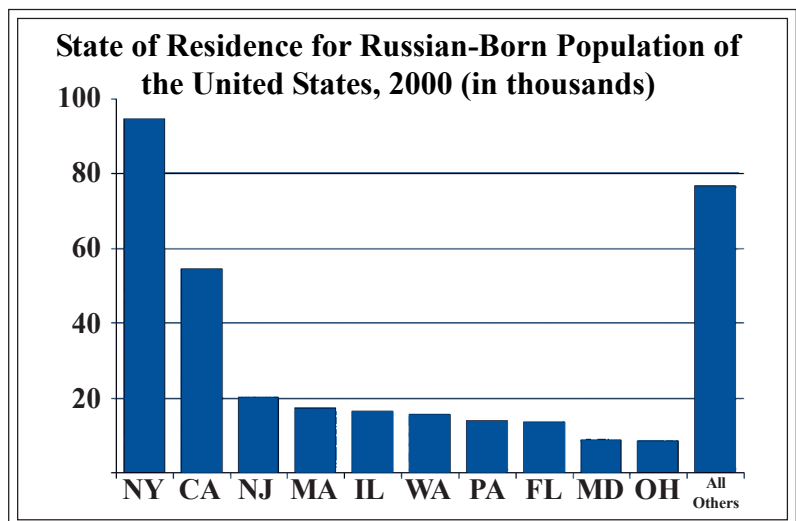
The large waves of Russian immigration from 1880-1914 mainly arrived on the opposite coast of the United States, where many settled in New York and Pennsylvania, especially in the large cities of New York City and Philadelphia. Boston, Chicago, Cleveland and Pittsburgh also featured notable Russian communities, while a significant number settled in northeastern Pennsylvania and became coal miners.

Over the last 100 years, many Russian immigrants have settled in locations where the Russian population is already thriving. This has led to a markedly different settlement pattern than other recent immigrant groups. Russian immigrants are far more likely to be living in the northeastern United States and far less likely to be living in the west.

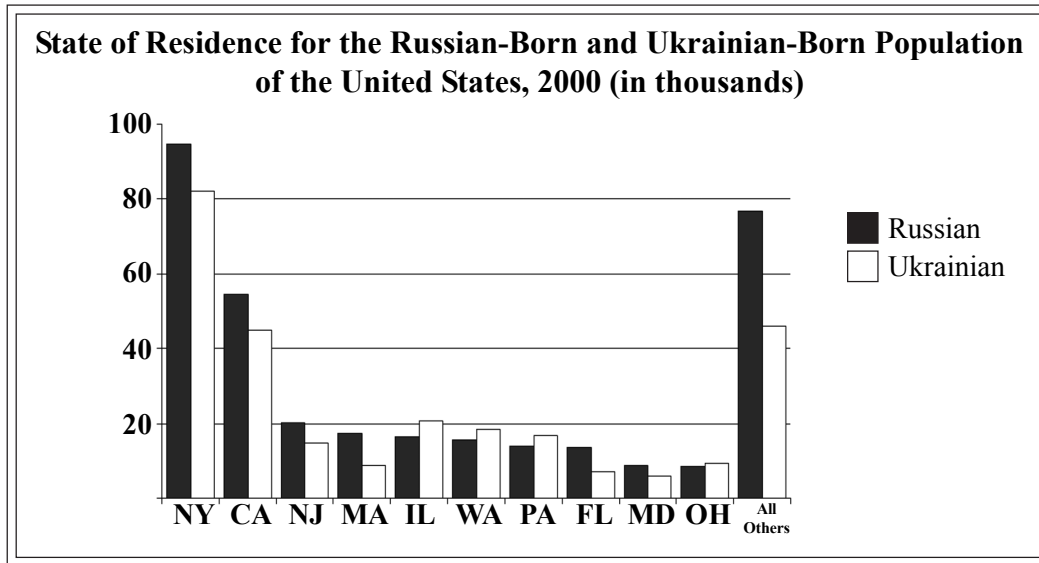


The Ukrainian immigrant population showed similar characteristics to the Russian population. Of the 275,153 Ukrainian-born immigrants living in the United States in 2000, 49 percent resided in the northeastern states, 28 percent resided in the west, 16 percent in the Midwest and 7 percent in the south.

Nearly half of all Russians in the U.S. live in states northeast of Washington, D.C. According to Census 2000, New York accounts for more than one-quarter of the Russian immigrant population in the United States alone, with New Jersey home to the third greatest number, Massachusetts the fourth greatest number, Pennsylvania seventh and Maryland ninth.



The ten states in the chart on the previous page – New York, California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois, Washington, Pennsylvania, Florida, Maryland and Ohio – accounted for more than three-quarters of the Russian immigrants living in the United States in 2000. The Russian population of New York alone exceeded that of 42 states and the District of Columbia combined. If the sizeable Ukrainian born population is included, these same ten states account for more than 80 percent of the nation’s total.



Between 1990 and 2000, nearly every state recorded an increase between the Russian-born population in 2000 and the USSR-born population in 1990, despite the fact that the former did not contain the immigrant population from the former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, Armenia and Belarus. In the case of every state but North Dakota, an increase could be noted by adding in the Ukrainian-born total from 2000.

The rise in the Russian- and Ukrainian-born population of the U.S. between 1990 and 2000 was in stark contrast to what had occurred the prior decade. With the notable exception of California, where the population rose by almost one-third, the population of Soviet immigrants declined in almost every state between 1980 and 1990. This decline was a product of low levels of new immigration from the U.S.S.R. and the advanced age of many Russian immigrants living in the United States at the time. Even general migration shifts of the American population could not explain the vast drops, as the population declines were also noted in Sun Belt states such as Florida and Arizona. Pacific Coast states were the only exception.

	1980 ¹	1990 ¹	Change	2000 ²	2000 ³	Combined ⁴
Florida	34,859	17,530	-17,329	13,768	7,005	20,773
New York	112,725	98,576	-14,149	94,595	82,238	176,833
Pennsylvania	26,599	17,613	-8,986	13,885	16,897	30,792
Michigan	13,142	7,590	-5,552	6,817	5,393	12,210
New Jersey	25,036	19,508	-5,528	20,243	14,768	35,011
North Dakota	2,395	697	-1,698	269	194	463
Arizona	2,815	1,490	-1,325	2,347	866	3,213
Iowa	1,662	449	-1,213	1,391	555	1,946
Mississippi	1,128	29	-999	310	130	440
West Virginia	1,005	40	-965	231	104	335
Washington	3,393	3,534	+141	15,491	18,573	34,064
Oregon	2,507	3,561	+1,054	5,970	7,678	13,648
California	58,642	77,430	+18,788	54,660	44,953	99,613

(1) Soviet-born, (2) Russia-born (3) Ukraine-born (4) Combined Russia and Ukraine born

The demographics of the Russian-born population in the United States today differ significantly from other groups. Because of the long lapse between periods of high immigration, Russians are both disproportionately older and disproportionately younger than many other immigrant groups.

More than one-fifth of Russians living in the United States are age 62 or older, and more than one in twenty are age 85 or older. Owing to the fact that a significant segment of the Russian immigrant population arrived in the United States prior to World War II (and in some cases, prior to World War I), these figures are significantly higher than other immigrant groups with large populations. They are also much higher than the native born population.

**Pct. of U.S. Population Age 62+ and 85+,
by Country of Birth, 2000**

<u>Country</u>	<u>62 or older</u>	<u>85 or older</u>
Ukraine	29.3	2.9
Belarus	25.5	2.5
Russia	20.8	5.2
China	18.3	1.2
Philippines	15.1	1.0
U.S.A.	14.9	1.5
Haiti	10.3	0.5
Korea	10.0	0.5
Vietnam	8.4	0.4
Mexico	5.3	0.4
El Salvador	4.5	0.3
<i>All foreign born</i>	<i>13.1</i>	<i>1.3</i>

Source: Census 2000

However, the recent surge in immigration from post-communist Russia makes it stand out from other nations with significant numbers of immigrants to the United States in the first half of the 20th century. Compared to these nations, which have not experienced a “second wave,” the Russian population is quite young.

In fact, upon closer inspection, the Russian-born population in the United States also turns out to be quite a bit younger than that of many other recent immigrant groups. Above, we noted that the Russian-born population tends to skew older than that of Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Mexicans, with a higher portion of the population above the age of 62. Yet when we examine the same groups for the percentage of the population under the age of 18, we find that almost one-fifth of the Russian-born fall into this category, compared to one-in-seven Mexican immigrants and one-in-twelve Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants.

**Pct. of U.S. Population in Given Age Groups,
by Country of Birth, 2000**

<u>Country</u>	<u>62 or older</u>	<u>85 or older</u>	<u>Median Age</u>
Russia	20.8	5.2	43.6
United Kingdom	28.9	3.2	49.6
Greece	33.1	3.5	54.2
Germany	36.0	4.4	54.6
Ireland	37.8	6.3	55.1
Italy	45.5	8.2	59.8
Austria	51.3	13.0	63.0

Source: Census 2000

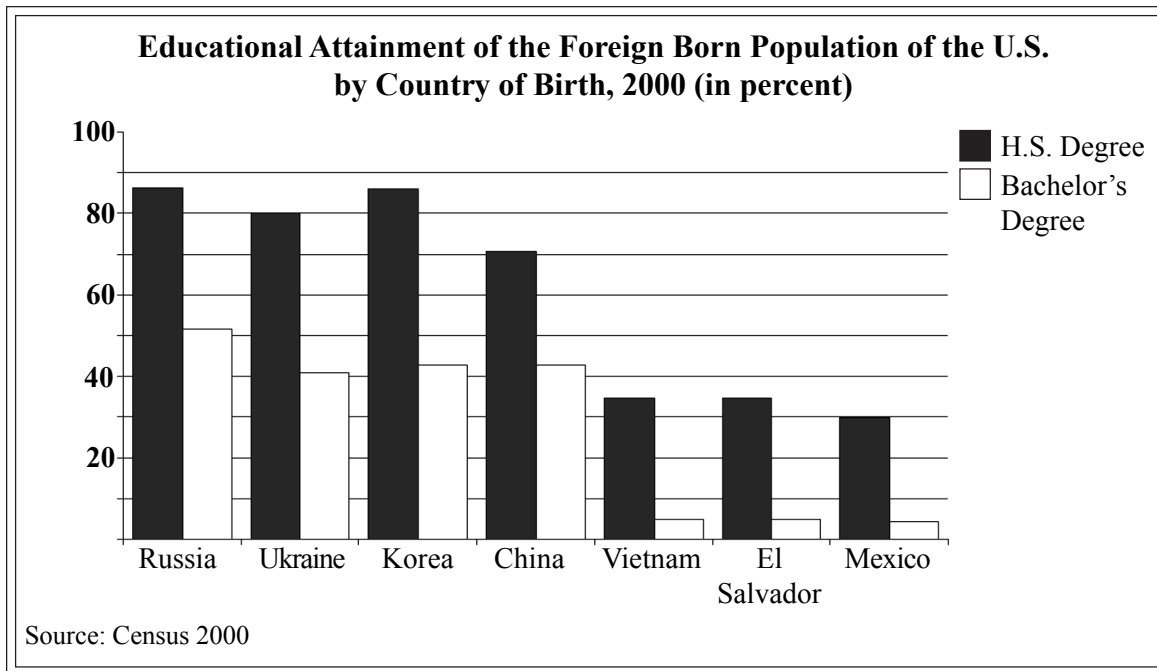
**Pct. of U.S. Population in Given Age Groups,
by Country of Birth, 2000**

<u>Country</u>	<u>17 or younger</u>	<u>Age 18-62</u>	<u>62 or older</u>
Russia	19.0	60.2	20.8
Ukraine	15.7	55.0	29.3
China	8.0	73.7	18.3
Philippines	9.8	75.1	15.1
Haiti	7.2	82.5	10.3
Korea	12.5	77.5	10.0
Vietnam	8.3	83.3	8.4
Mexico	13.9	80.8	5.3
El Salvador	7.9	87.6	4.5
U.S.A.	27.5	57.6	14.9

Source: Census 2000

The large “tails” leave only three-fifths of Russian-born Americans in what would be considered “working-age.” The percentage of the Ukrainian-born population that falls between the ages of 18 and 62 is even lower.

Statistics from Census 2000 also show that Russian-born immigrants to the United States tend to be more educated than other groups with high rates of recent immigration. Of Russian immigrants over the age of 25, nearly seven-in-eight have a high school diploma and more than half have a bachelor’s degree. Educational attainment rates for Ukrainian born immigrants are also notably higher than those of other groups.



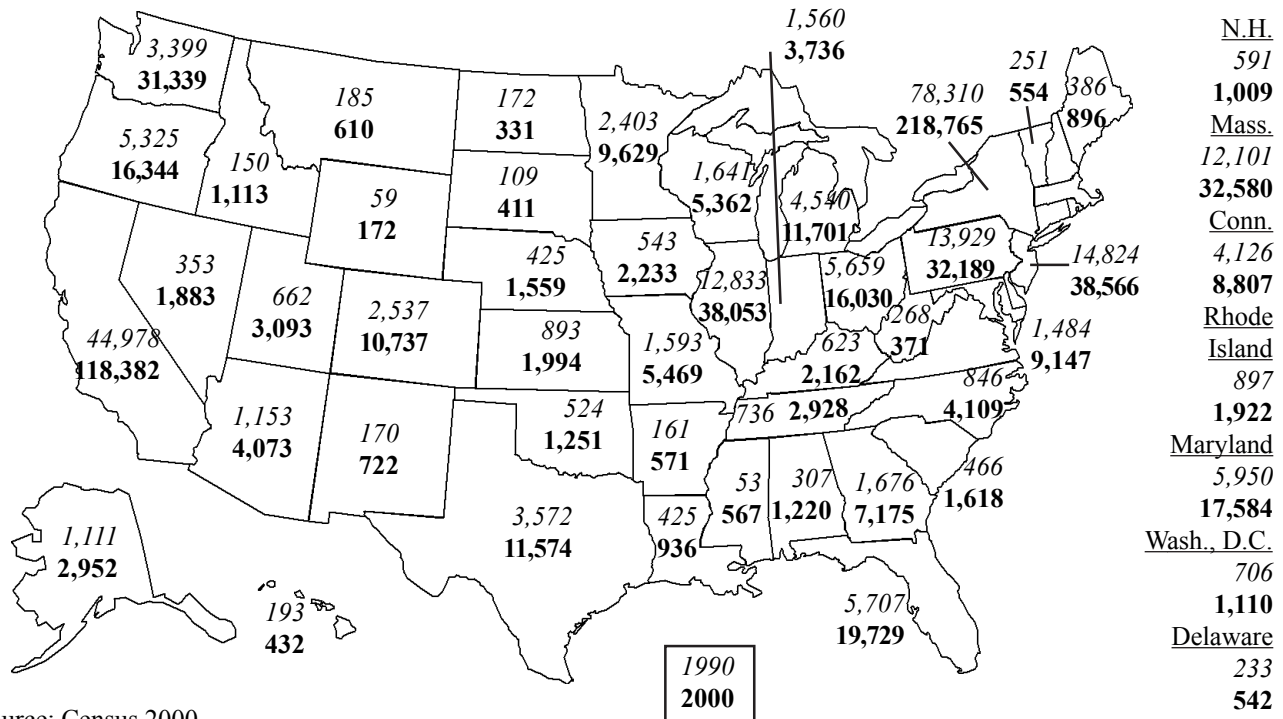
Russian Speakers in the United States

Census 2000 found more than 700,000 people who speak Russian as the predominant language at home in the United States, almost triple the number found in 1990. Nationwide, Russian is now the tenth most common language spoken, ranking among the top ten languages in 18 states and more than 375 counties.

As they were in 1990, New York, California and New Jersey remained home to the most, second most and third most Russian speakers. Nevertheless, the growth in the Russian speaking population of these states was astounding. New York’s Russian speaking population soared from 78,310 to 218,765 over the ten-year span from 1990 to 2000, meaning that 1-in-every-81 residents of the state spoke Russian at home. Over this same span, California’s Russian speaking population increased from 44,978 to 118,382 and New Jersey’s jumped from 14,824 to 38,566.

These states were hardly alone. Every single state saw an increase in Russian speakers, ranging from 38 percent in the case of West Virginia to nearly 1000 percent in Mississippi. The increases were so dramatic that Pennsylvania’s 13,929 Russian speakers placed the state fourth in 1990, but that same figure wouldn’t have cracked the top ten in 2000.

Number of Residents, Age 5 and Older, Who Speak Russian at Home, 1990 and 2000



The 10 years between 1990 and 2000 saw a slight diffusion in the concentration of America's Russian speakers. In 1990, more than half lived in just two states (New York and California) and more than 82 percent lived in just 10 jurisdictions. By 2000, these figures had declined to 47.7 percent and 79.8 percent, respectively, as the number of Russian speakers in the south and west soared by thousands.

While states such as New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and California have long been home to a significant number of Russian speakers, others are experiencing the need for Russian language assistance for the first time. In many of these states, assimilation efforts directed toward Russians would have been an afterthought in 1990. Cases include:

- **Washington:** Home to fewer than 3,500 Russian speakers in 1990, the Russian speaking population soared to more than 31,000 by 2000, when it was the eighth most common language spoken in the state.
- **North Carolina:** There were fewer than 1,000 Russian speakers statewide in 1990, but the population increased by nearly 400 percent over the next ten years.
- **Utah:** Between 1990 and 2000, the Russian speaking population of the Beehive State jumped from 662 to more than 3,000, where it ranked as the 12th most common language spoken in the state.

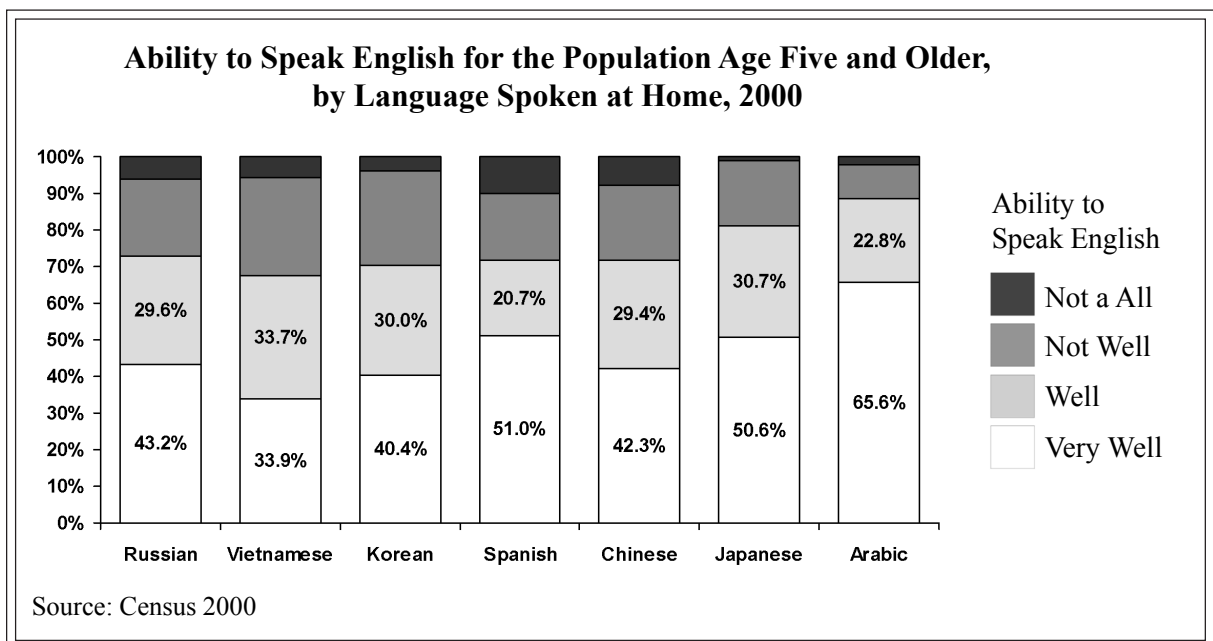
The largest concentration of Russian speakers in the United States is in Kings County (the borough of Queens) in New York State. In 2000, Kings County was home to more than 135,000 individuals who spoke Russian at home, accounting for nearly six percent of the entire population of the county. The number of Russian speakers in Kings County represents almost 20 percent of the total population in the United States and exceeds that of the other 49 states.

English Proficiency Among Russian Speakers

Of course, if those who spoke Russian at home had high degrees of English proficiency as well, there would be little need for assimilation efforts within the Russian community. Therefore, we must examine English proficiency rates in order to determine where English language learning resources must be directed, or if they are needed at all.

According to data from Census 2000, almost three-quarters of Americans who speak Russian at home speak English “very well” or “well.” The 72.77 percent figure combined between these two categories places the English proficiency of Russian speakers slightly higher, but in the same vicinity as the portion of Spanish speakers (71.7 percent), Chinese speakers (71.7 percent), Korean speakers (70.4 percent). Among major linguistic groups with high rates of immigration to the United States, only Arabic speakers and Japanese speakers fare significantly better, while only Vietnamese speakers fare generally worse in terms of English proficiency.

The remainder of those who speak Russian at home fall into the two lowest categories of English proficiency, those who speak English “not well” (21 percent) and those who speak no English at all (6 percent). These figures are generally in line with those of other major groups with high recent rates of immigration, excluding Arabic and Japanese speakers. The breakdown of linguistic proficiency by language spoken at home is shown in the chart below.



Given the high proportion of recent immigrants among the Russian speaking population, it might be assumed that the English proficiency rate of this group declined significantly between 1990 and 2000. With the addition of 460,000 Russian speakers to the total number, not to mention replacements for older immigrants who died over that decade, it would be easy to assume that the Russian-speaking population of 2000 has more trouble with English than that of 1990.

Ironically, however, while the number of people speaking Russian at home changed drastically between 1990 and 2000, the English proficiency rate of the Russian speaking population went virtually unchanged between those two data points. As mentioned earlier, 72.77 percent of those who spoke Russian at home in

2000 spoke English “very well” or “well,” allowing them virtually unfettered access to an English-speaking society. In 1990, when the Russian speaking population was one-third the size it was in 2000 and the average Russian speaker had been in the United States far longer, 72.99 percent of Russian speakers spoke English “very well” or “well.” The 0.22 percent decline is virtually negligible.

On the other extreme, the results are much the same. Whereas we would expect that there would be a large number of newcomers who have no command of the English language whatsoever, the data proves otherwise. In 1990, 6.178 percent of Russian speakers described themselves as having no English fluency. In 2000, that same category included 6.177 percent of Russian speakers, a difference of 0.001 percent.

	<u>Russian speakers</u>	Pct. of Russian speakers who speak English—		
		<u>Very well or Well</u>	<u>Not Well</u>	<u>Not at All</u>
1990	241,798	72.992	20.829	6.178
2000	706,240	72.772	21.051	6.177
Pct. change	+192.1%	-0.3%	+1.1%	-0.0%

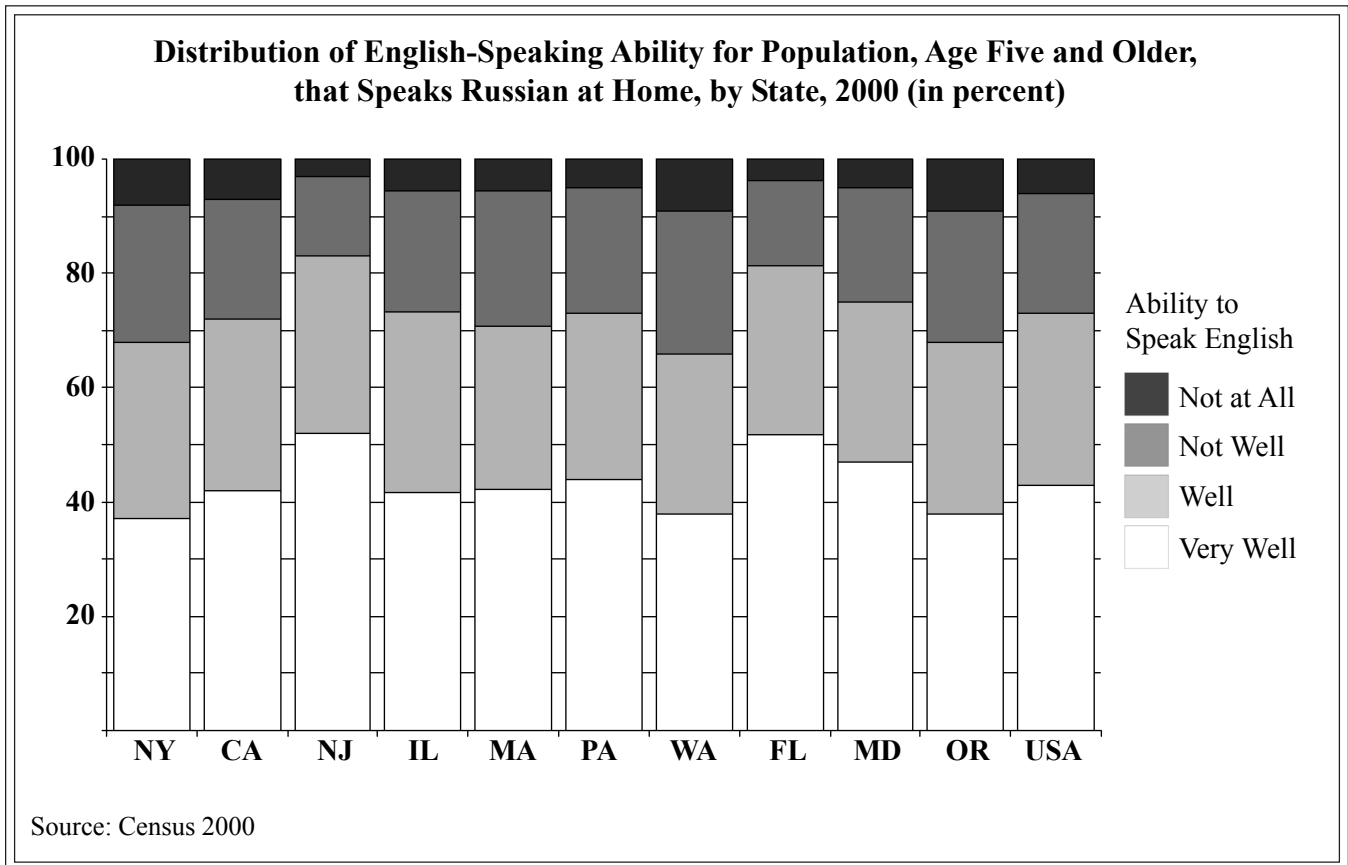
On a state-by-state basis, it comes as little surprise that the states with the greatest number of Russian speakers are often the most likely to have the lowest levels of English proficiency among Russian speakers.

In states where the number of Russian speakers is smallest, it is highly likely that there will be few employment opportunities and minimal government services available in Russian. Hence it becomes absolutely imperative for individuals to have English fluency, even if they choose to speak Russian at home. Conversely, in areas where there are a high number of Russian speakers, English fluency is a less pressing matter. Individuals in these communities can work and do business in their native language and contact with non-Russian speakers can be minimized.

Of the ten states with the greatest number of Russian speakers, five also place on the top ten list in terms of lowest English proficiency rates. Washington, with the seventh greatest number of Russian speakers, and a state which experienced a tremendous growth in the Russian speaking population between 1990 and 2000, had the lowest rate of all. More than one-third of Washington’s Russian speakers have little or no English proficiency. Oregon, another state with a recent influx of Russian immigration, placed second at 32.03 percent, followed by New York at 31.69 percent.

	<u>Russian speakers</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Pct. LEP</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Washington	31,340	7	34.04	1
Oregon	16,345	10	32.03	2
New York	218,765	1	31.69	3
South Dakota	409	48	31.54	4
Colorado	10,735	14	29.48	5
Massachusetts	32,580	5	29.24	6
Minnesota	9,630	17	27.99	7
California	118,380	2	27.93	8
Ohio	16,030	11	27.13	9
Rhode Island	1,925	29	27.01	10

However, there were exceptions. Pennsylvania, which was a prime destination for Russian immigration early in the 20th century, has the sixth highest number of Russian speakers, but only the 13th highest level of limited English proficiency among this group. Maryland, with the ninth highest Russian speaking population, ranks 17th in LEP rates. The true surprise here might be the state of New Jersey, whose 38,565 Russian speakers ranks it third in the nation in that category. Yet despite the significant population of Russian speakers, only 17.24 percent, or roughly 1-in-6 members of this group, struggle with English. This ranks 33rd among the states.



Conclusion

At first glance, it may appear that extending English teaching and assimilation efforts toward Russian immigrants in the United States would prove difficult. Critics of these efforts will point to the rather significant age gap among Russian immigrants, with higher than average populations both above the age of 65 and below the age of 18. This age distribution, unique among America's recent immigrant groups, makes it clear that a one-size-fits-all package will not work. After all, there is a wide difference between the needs of the young population, which will need English to survive in the American workforce, and the elderly population, which at best can be expected to gain minimal proficiency in the language of this country.

Outside of the importance of addressing these two groups differently, however, the Russian immigrant population demonstrates many factors that are conducive to a beneficial Americanization effort. The population is generally well-educated, with more than 80 percent holding a high school diploma and 50 percent holding a college degree. Familiarity with a classroom environment and learning efforts will eliminate one of the barriers that keeps many people from never attempting to improve their English proficiency.

Russian-immigrants also remain concentrated in several states, and in some cases, several cities. More than one-fifth of the Russian speakers in the United States live in the New York City borough of Queens, and New York and California are home to almost half of the nation's Russian speakers. Should government and non-government entities in these two jurisdictions invest in English learning efforts in their Russian speaking communities, the number of limited English proficient Russians could be greatly reduced. In the case of younger Russian immigrants, this seems like a small price to pay for what should result in higher incomes and reduced need for government assistance.

The recent arrival of many Russian immigrants should also be taken into consideration. As a 2005 Pew Hispanic Center study of Mexican migrants illustrated, the more years immigrants are able to survive in this country without English proficiency, the less likely they are to learn English. In many cases, if immigrants fail to start on the road to English learning soon after their arrival, many do not learn at all. In the case of Russian immigrants, we can see that this is true for many members of the older generation. By reaching the recent Russian arrivals before they find ways in which to lead an "English-optional" existence, we will curtail this vicious cycle. Should we wait in our outreach efforts, we run the risk of facing the problems of limited English proficiency in perpetuity.

While the great prospect for long term assimilation and language learning success lies within these recent arrivals, we cannot forget that there is another segment of the Russian immigrant population that has high rates of limited English proficiency. The elderly population, which includes both recent arrivals and those from generations ago, must be considered in any Americanization effort.

Elderly Russian immigrants who struggle with English present a unique problem. Many have lived in the United States for decades, and are therefore adept at surviving despite language obstacles. They are less likely to work, and if they do, they are employed in jobs that require little or no English proficiency. Elderly Russians will probably have little interest in intensive English classes, or even if they do, are likely to get little out of the instructional effort.

Unlike the ambitious goal of making younger Russian immigrants part of the latest wave of newcomers to reach the American dream, the goal for elderly Russians must be to teach the very basics so that they may live slightly more independent lives. Senior centers and community centers might be the best locations for the basic English outreach efforts, which might include basic tasks such as going to the post office or to the grocery store.

Young or old, Russian immigrants cannot be forgotten in a push toward English acquisition. Often overshadowed by recent immigration from Spanish speaking countries and immigrants from southeast Asia, Russian immigrants remain a significant part of newcomers to the United States. Like all immigrants, they can be an asset if assimilated, a burden if a push toward English learning is neglected. In the case of most Russian immigrants, however, the pieces for a successful integration into American life are waiting and ready to be assembled. We let this opportunity pass us by at our peril.