

**ENGLISH IN AMERICA:
A STUDY OF LINGUISTIC INTEGRATION**

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English in America: A Study of Linguistic Integration

Findings

- **There exists an English Acquisition Gap between Hispanic immigrants and immigrants of other ancestries.** Seventy-one percent of the foreign born speak English proficiently, with different ancestries acquiring English at widely different levels. The ancestries above the median are diverse in continent of origin and native language. The ancestries at the bottom of the scale are disproportionately of Mexican or Central American origin.
- **The English Acquisition Gap cannot be explained by the relative recency of immigration.** When comparing different immigrant groups, it is crucial to control for any premature conclusions arising from different times of entry into the United States. When recency is taken into account, the English Acquisition Gap between the Hispanic and the non-Hispanic foreign-born is still evident; in fact, the gap exceeds 20 percentage points.
- **The English Acquisition Gap is evident between the most prominent immigrant groups, and cannot be explained by “issues” with the Spanish language.** Recent arrivals from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe are significantly more likely to learn English than natives of Mexico and Central America. Sub-Saharan Africans and Russians speak English at well above the 71 percent national average, while Mexicans and Guatemalans speak English at the lowest levels of proficiency. Nonetheless, many groups that hail from Spanish-speaking countries speak English at well above the national average, including Venezuelans and Argentineans.
- **There exists a Citizenship Acquisition Gap between Hispanic immigrants and immigrants of other ancestries.** As with language, different ancestry groups display vastly different rates of naturalization in the United States. For immigrants that arrived in the United States between 1980 and March 2000, the naturalization rate was 26 percent. However, on one end of the scale, Vietnamese immigrants are naturalized at twice this rate. On the other hand, Mexican immigrants are naturalized at only half the national average. These varying rates are evident on both a national and state level.
- **The English Acquisition Gap may be explained in part by the phenomenon of Demographic Dominance.** The U.S. immigrant population, once made up of a diverse mix of nationalities, has become dominated by a single nation. Though the Mexican-born percentage of the immigrant population in 2000 is roughly identical to the German-born percentage of the population in 1890, the lack of representation by other leading immigrant nations may have led to the development of a de facto “second national language.” In 1890, the combined total of the second, third and fourth most common immigrant homelands represented more than 44 percent of the foreign born. In 2000, the nations in the same standing accounted for just over 10 percent.

Introduction

The American political conversation has recently focused in part on whether our nation is properly seen as “One America” or “Two Americas.”¹ Usually the question centers on differences in the economic and social status of Americans, and whether or not the electoral map breaks down into liberal “Blue States” or conservative “Red States”.

The questions — One or Two? Red or Blue? — also sound in our national discussions about immigration. When it comes to the issue of language, there can be little debate that there are Two Americas: One America for the majority who can speak English, and another America for those who cannot. English proficiency is the difference between a life of citizenship or non-citizenship; it is the gap in liberty between effective speech and an unheard voice; and it is the distance between pursuing happiness with upward mobility or under a language-imposed ceiling.² In short, the English language for immigrants is a necessary condition for America to truly be the Land of Opportunity.

Extensive government and private sector surveys further this reality. The U.S. Department of Education found that those with limited English proficiency are less likely to be employed, less likely to be employed continuously, tend to work in the least desirable sectors and earn less than those who speak English.³

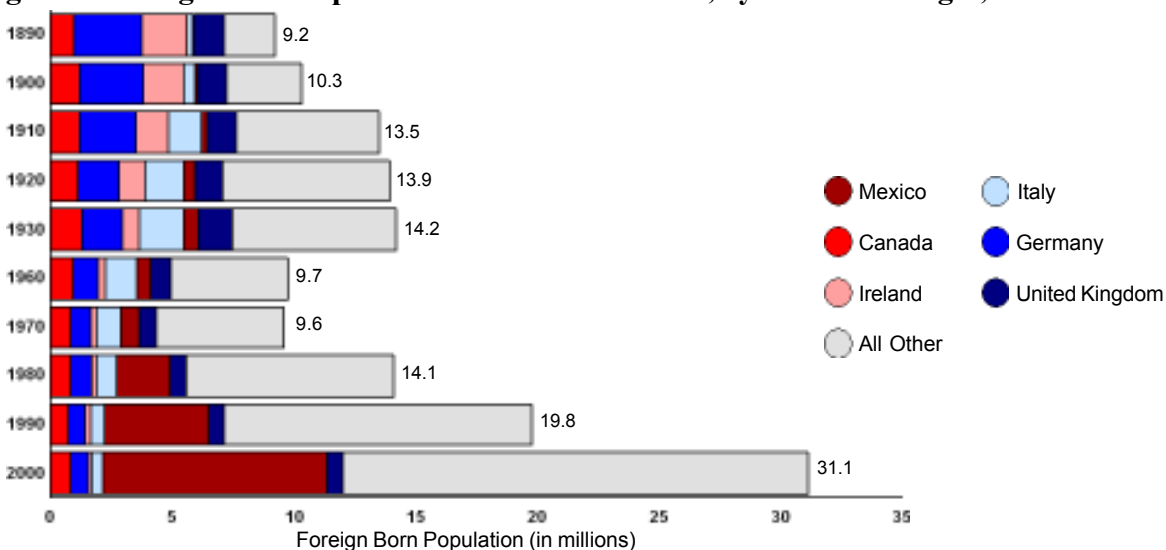
Furthermore, when it comes to the limited English

proficiency of *immigrants*, the differences are even more startling. In 1999, the average employed immigrant who spoke English very well earned \$40,741, nearly two-and-one-half times the amount earned by immigrants who did not speak English at all.⁴ Additional data from the National Adult Literacy Survey found that immigrants with a low degree of English proficiency earned one-half of what those with a medium degree of proficiency earned and less than one-third of what highly English proficient immigrants earned.⁵

Beginning with changes to our laws in the 1960’s, America has been under what some have called the Second Great Wave of Immigration.⁶ Indeed, the share of the population that is foreign born today is at a 70-year high, and the number of foreign born today is 157 percent higher than at any time in our history⁷ (Figure A).

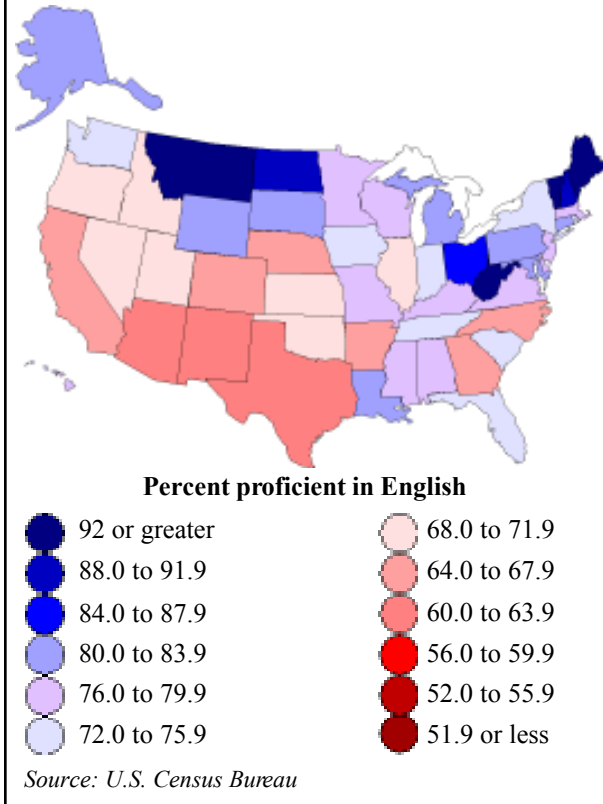
With our rich tradition of successful immigrant integration, it is unsurprising that we are One America with respect to attitudes about integration. Since many Americans have a family history that is traceable to a foreign land, the public overwhelmingly supports the contribution of legal immigrants.⁸ Recognizing that the people of many nations could not become one cohesive unit without a common language, 80 percent also agree with the proposition that immigrants should be expected to learn English.⁹ This study seeks in part to discover whether or not today’s immigrants are meeting that ideal.

Figure A. Foreign-Born Population of the United States, by Nation of Origin, 1890–2000



Notes: Country of origin data not collected by the Census 1940-1950; United Kingdom totals are for Great Britain, 1890-1920
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure B. English Proficiency Rates of the Foreign Born, by state, 2000



The expectation that immigrants learn English is tested against the everyday experience of an increasing number of Americans. In checkout lines, service stations, and grocery stores across the nation, one no longer need live in New York or Los Angeles to encounter a near-daily language barrier. The foreign language we are most likely to encounter is Spanish.¹⁰ Figure B demonstrates the national nature of this phenomenon by measuring the English proficiency of immigrants in each state. The levels of English proficiency are comparable in immigrant gateway California and in Farm Belt Nebraska. The foreign born in Florida are about as likely (and unlikely) to speak English as those in Tennessee.

There has been much discussion about whether or not today's immigrants are learning English and adopting an American identity at the same rate as their predecessors.¹¹ In our view, these debates have been long on polemic and short on empiricism.¹² The purpose of this project is to assess the shape of linguistic and civic integration in the United States.

Our report does not deal with race per se, but any discussion that touches on race and ancestry must do

so in a delicate manner. There is an undeniable history of discrimination in America against immigrants in general, and against specific ancestry groups in particular. Our discussion is devised to counter that history, by taking the first steps on a course that will help policymakers to enable every immigrant to acquire the English language and American citizenship, the keys to the American Dream.

One of the key findings of our study is that Mexican and Central American immigrants tend to acquire English and citizenship at much lower rates than their similarly situated counterparts. While the idea that immigrants are not a single monolithic bloc of same-skilled individuals is not new, we categorically reject any effort to use this finding to argue for the fundamental inferiority or superiority of any group of immigrants.

This study should be seen as merely a starting point for any policy discussion about the linguistic and civic integration of immigrants. We have made no attempt to compile different policy options or issue recommendations. The first step in any inquiry about social policy is to assess the situation.

Methodology

This study examines decennial Census data for the years 1850 through 2000 to offer a comprehensive view of the state of English language acquisition and civic integration in the U.S.

Language proficiency data has been obtained from the Census "long form," distributed to one in six households. Respondents were asked to indicate whether each member of the household, age five and older, speaks English at home. If not, they were asked to list the language spoken and evaluate the English speaking ability of each member from four choices: "very well," "well," "not well" and "not at all".

As these data are self-reported, there is likely to be significant variance in the evaluation of these categories. The Census terms all who speak English less than "very well" as limited English proficient, based on information learned from the English Language Proficiency Survey in 1982.¹³

However, the distinction between "very well"

Figure C. English Proficiency of U.S. Residents Who Do Not Speak English at Home, 1980–2000 (figures in millions)

Year	Pop. Age 5+	Speak Other Lg.	Very Well	A			Total A	Total B
				Well	Not Well	Not At All		
1980	210.25	23.06	12.88	5.96	3.01	1.22	10.18 (4.8%)	4.22 (2.0%)
1990	230.45	31.84	17.86	7.31	4.83	1.85	13.98 (6.1%)	6.67 (2.9%)
2000	262.38	46.95	25.63	10.33	7.62	3.37	21.32 (8.1%)	10.99 (4.2%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

and “well” remains open to much speculation. Furthermore, immigrants who speak English “well” are likely to be able to fully participate in most aspects of American life, rendering the perceived fluency gap inconsequential.

Therefore, for this report those who speak English “very well” or “well” are classified as English proficient (EP) and those who speak English “not well” or “not at all” as limited English proficient (LEP).

For the year 2000, 21.3 million, or 8.1 percent of the American population over the age of five years old is LEP under the definition set forth by the Census, but 11.0 million, or 4.2 percent, is LEP under the parameters set by this report (Figure C).

Ancestry data were also derived from the Census long form, and were also self-reported. Respondents were asked to specify each person’s “ancestry or ethnic origin” and given two lines in which to denote the information. Four-fifths of respondents chose at least one ancestry, while nearly one-quarter indicated two ancestries.¹⁴ Though the self-reported nature of the answers yields a handful of question marks (i.e. 34,173 of the 19,035,580 individuals who reported their ancestries as “American” also indicated they were immigrants¹⁵), all of this report deals with ancestry populations of a significant number, thereby minimizing any quirks arising from the self-reported information.

Citizenship data also was determined from the Census long form. The 2000 Census questionnaire asked respondents to identify their country of birth. If the respondent was not born in the United States, he was asked to supply his country of birth and the year of arrival in the United States.

Subsequently, the respondent was asked whether he was a citizen of the United States. As a yes/no question, no differentiation was made between those who have come to the United States illegally and those who may be in this country legally for work, educa-

tion or other valid reasons.

According to the Census data, the percentage of immigrants who had become citizens of the United States was virtually identical in 1990 and 2000, although both demonstrated a marked decrease from 1970 and 1980 (Figure D).

The rise in non-citizens may be due in part to the increase of illegal immigration in the United States, estimated by the Department of Justice to have grown from 3.5 million people in 1990 to 7.0 million in 2000.¹⁶

The terms “foreign born” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably in this report to refer to a person who was not born in the United States, Puerto Rico, a U.S. Island Area or born overseas to a U.S. citizen parent. This definition is consistent with that of the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁷

The Census Bureau is also the basis for the definition of the term “ancestry,” which is used to describe a person’s ethnic background in this report. The Census defines ancestry as “a person’s ethnic origin, heritage, descent, or ‘roots,’ which may reflect their place of birth, place of birth of parents or ancestors, and ethnic identities that have evolved within the United States.”¹⁸

Due to confidentiality protections, the Census does not release statistical data for some categories if the total number of cases falls under a certain threshold.

Figure D. Citizenship status of the Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 1970–2000 (figures in millions)

Year	Total	Citizens	Non Citizens	Pct. Citizen
1970	9.62	6.08	3.54	63.18%
1980	14.08	7.11	6.97	50.50%
1990	19.77	8.00	11.77	40.46%
2000	31.11	12.54	18.57	40.32%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

There exists an *English Acquisition Gap between Hispanic immigrants and immigrants of other ancestries.*

The majority of immigrants, of every ancestry, are capable of speaking English. Some immigrant groups are learning English more readily than others, but the question is one of degree. Still, immigrants of different ancestries unquestionably acquire English at different rates. Relative to other ancestries, immigrants of Hispanic origin are the least likely to be English proficient (Figure I-A).

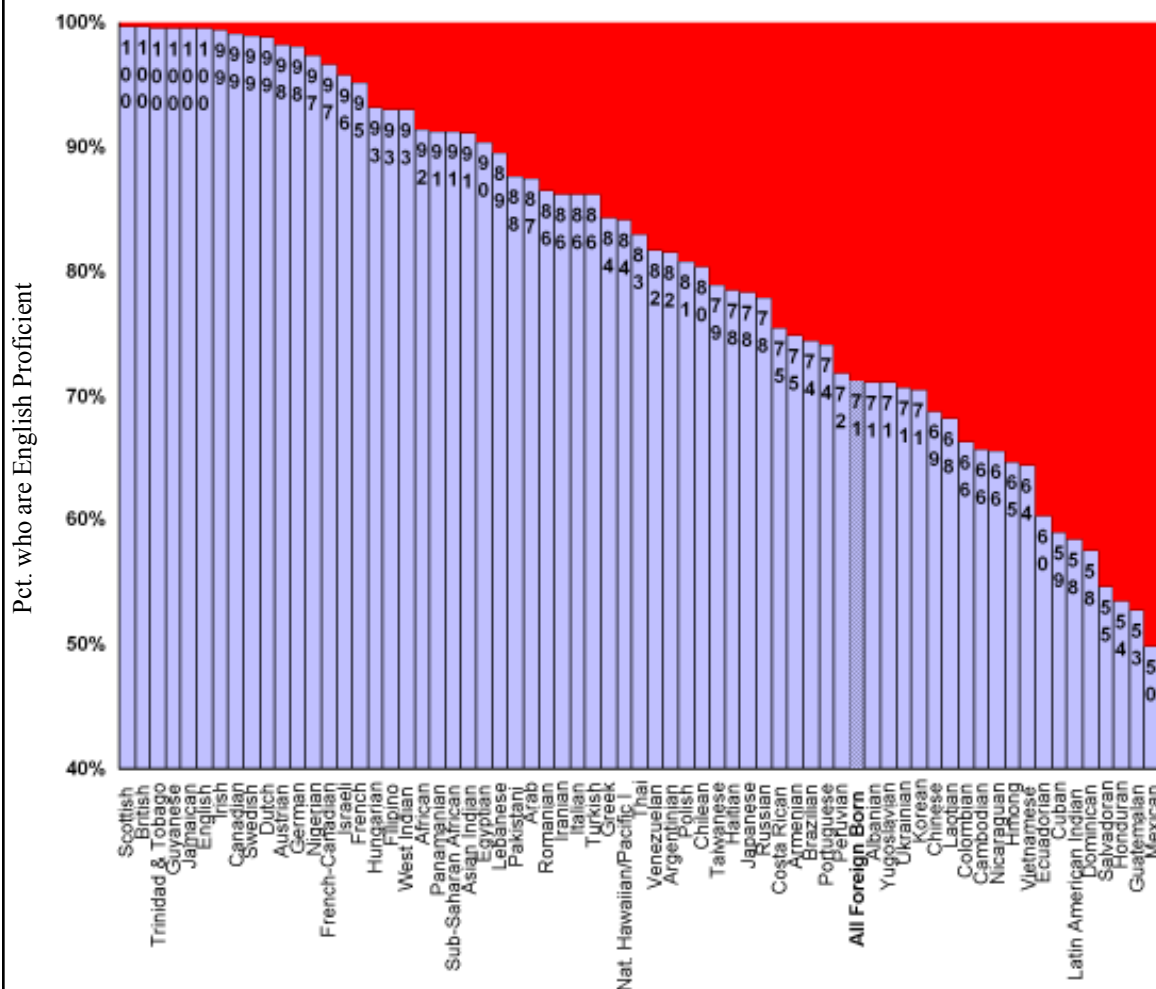
As of March 2000, 71.2 percent of the foreign born population of the United States can be classified as English proficient.¹⁹ Among the 66 ancestries with foreign-born populations of greater than 50,000, 47 speak English at rates above the national average. Five ancestries speak English at rounded rates of 100 percent; unsurprisingly, these countries of origin are all

English-speaking countries.

The nine ancestries that speak English at or very close to the national average show that linguistic integration is attainable regardless of one's linguistic or cultural history. A diverse group of five ancestries (Peruvian, Albanian, Yugoslavian, Ukrainian, and Korean) speak English within one percentage point of the 71.2 percent average. These immigrants hail from three different continents, have native tongues composed of different alphabets, and hail from countries that spent decades under communism or national fascism.

People from 15 different ancestries speak English at two or more percentage points below the 71.2 percent average; eleven of those hail from Spanish-speaking countries. Among these fifteen, the Bottom Eight all hail from Spanish speaking countries, with a low mark for immigrants of Mexican ancestry (50 percent).

Figure I-A. English Proficiency Rates of the Foreign Born, by ancestry



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Red State, Blue State

The Census data also allow a comparison between states in the rates at which their foreign-born populations acquire English. The maps included here are a variation of the Red State/Blue State phenomenon, with bluer shades indicating relatively higher rates of English acquisition, and redder shades indicating relatively lower rates of acquisition.

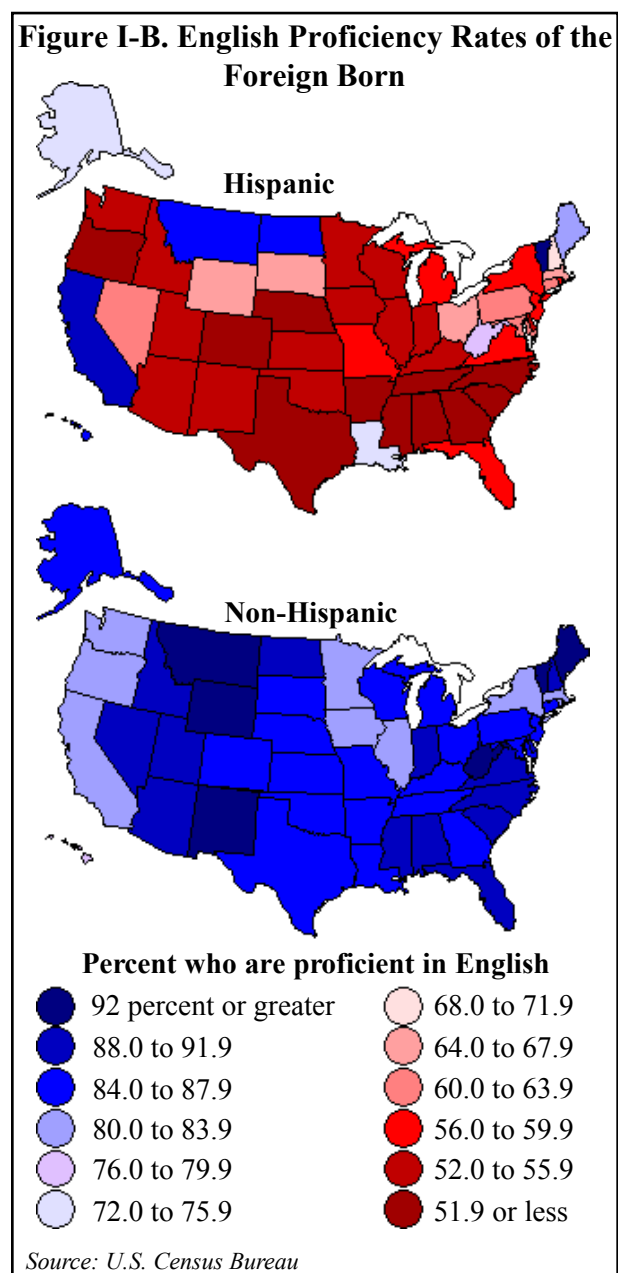
The Census data allow a second field of comparison in that particular ancestry groups can be isolated and graded. Figure I-B represents a comparison across states in the English proficiency of the Hispanic for-

ign born compared to the non-Hispanic foreign born.

The juxtaposition of the maps places the English Acquisition Gap in bold relief. When Hispanic ancestries alone are examined, the map reddens significantly. When non-Hispanic ancestries are separated, the map takes on a decidedly blue tint.

The comparison also yields several major differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic immigrants:

- The English proficiency rate for Hispanic immigrants fell shy of the English proficiency rate for non-Hispanic immigrants in 48 states and the District of Columbia.
- The average difference between Hispanic immigrant English proficiency and non-Hispanic immigrant English proficiency was 28.7 percentage points across all states.
- In states where Hispanics make up one-half or more of the foreign born the average difference in English proficiency was 35.5 percentage points, whereas it was 14.8 percentage points in states where Hispanics make up one-fifth or less of the foreign born.
- In states with more than 10,000 immigrant Hispanics, the average difference in English proficiency was 32.3 percentage points, whereas it was 11.8 percentage points in states with fewer than 10,000 immigrant Hispanics.
- In 37 states and the District of Columbia, the percentage of Hispanic immigrants who were English proficient trailed the percentage of non-Hispanic English proficient immigrants by 25 percentage points or more. Of the 13 remaining states, eight had foreign-born Hispanic populations of less than 10,000.
- In only four states (California, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Rhode Island) was the English proficiency rate for non-Hispanic immigrants below 82 percent. Conversely, there were only four states (Hawaii, Montana, North Dakota and Vermont) where the percentage of immigrant Hispanics who were English proficient was *above* 82 percent.
- In Alabama and South Carolina, fewer than one in two Hispanic immigrants are English proficient, whereas more than nine in ten non-Hispanic immigrants are English proficient.



The English Acquisition Gap cannot be explained by the relative recency of immigration

The English Acquisition Gap persists even after adjusting for the decade of an immigrant’s arrival in the United States. The adjustment is critical— if one group of immigrants disproportionately arrived in the United States in 1970–80, that group would have an unfair advantage in achieving English proficiency compared to immigrants who disproportionately arrived since 1990. But this “different arrival time” phenomenon can be factored into the analysis. Consider the following hypothetical comparison, where the groups differ in native country and numbers, but are united in their recency of arrival (Figure II-A):

Figure II-A. Example Recency Comparison, using Hypothetical Data

State	Ancestry	Pop.	Arrived since 1990	Pct.	Pct. LEP
A	Mexican	80,000	48,000	60	?
B	Mexican	50,000	30,000	60	?
C	Central Am.	20,000	12,000	60	?
D	Vietnamese	20,000	12,000	60	?
E	Korean	10,000	6,000	60	?

If the English Acquisition Gap is explained solely by recency of immigration, we would expect that, where ancestry groups have the same percentage of their in-state population who have arrived since 1990, the LEP percentage would be relatively equal across the categories. However, when ancestry groups are compared by the percentage that arrived in the past decade, the rates of limited English proficiency (LEP) display major differences.

At nearly every data point on the comparison chart, the overall trend is unmistakable: when recency of immigration is held equal across ancestries, those from Mexico and Central America acquire English at significantly lower rates than other immigrants.

For comparison purposes, this report takes a state-by-state look at limited English proficiency rates for each of six ancestry groups, plotting it against the percentage of each group that arrived between 1990 and March 2000. When this activity is performed, a clear pattern emerges, one that shows a significant language acquisition gap even when recency is held nearly constant.

Consider those instances where a state experienced 60-65 percent of a given ancestry group immigrate

in this 10-year span. There were 33 cases, covering four ancestries across 22 states. When LEP rates were ranked in descending order, Figure II-B emerged.

Figure II-B. Limited English Proficiency Rates for Ancestry Groups Where 60–65 Percent Arrived in a Given State Between 1990 and March 2000

State	Ancestry	Pct. Arrived Between 1990 and 2000	Pct. Limited English Proficient
Nebraska	Central American	65	61
Florida	Mexican	61	55
Rhode Island	Mexican	63	52
Oregon	Mexican	62	52
Indiana	Mexican	65	51
Maryland	Mexican	65	51
Kansas	Mexican	62	51
Wisconsin	Mexican	65	50
Michigan	Mexican	62	50
Iowa	Mexican	61	50
Ohio	Mexican	63	49
Rhode Island	Central American	60	49
Oklahoma	Mexican	61	47
Arkansas	Central American	64	46
Alabama	Central American	64	46
Indiana	Central American	64	45
Oklahoma	Central American	64	42
Michigan	Central American	63	40
South Carolina	Central American	63	30
Maine	Central American	60	29
North Carolina	South American	62	28
Arkansas	Chinese	63	21
West Virginia	Chinese	63	21
Idaho	Chinese	60	21
Nebraska	South American	63	20
Indiana	Chinese	65	18
Wisconsin	Chinese	64	17
Alabama	Chinese	64	17
Arkansas	South American	64	16
Oklahoma	South American	63	16
Tennessee	South American	62	14
Montana	Chinese	60	14
South Dakota	Chinese	63	13

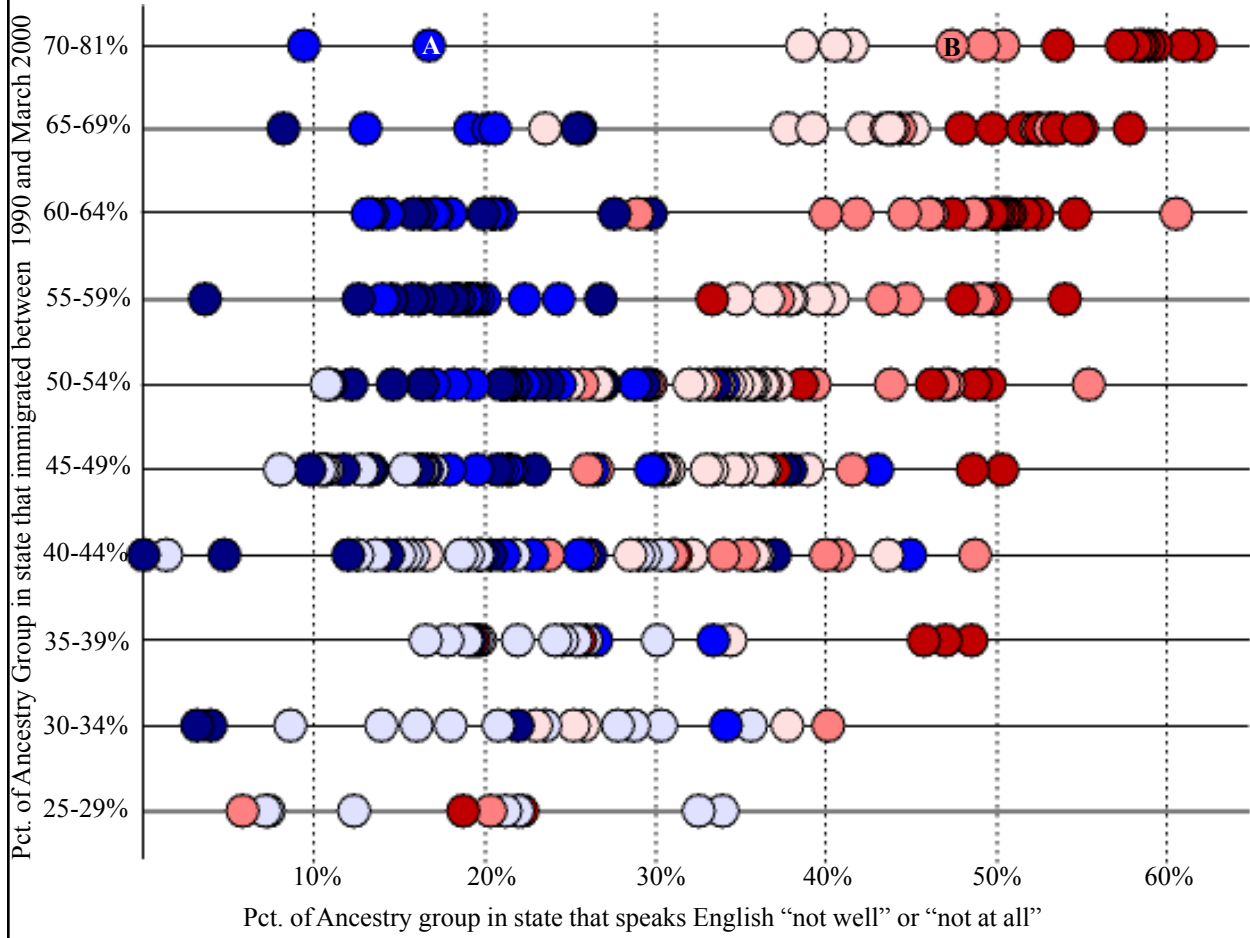
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The 20 instances with the highest limited English proficiency from this group all involved Mexican and Central American ancestries, while the bottom 13 involved Chinese and South American ancestries. More striking than the lineup, however, is that the groups are separated by a sizeable gap at two poles: Mexicans and Central Americans are clustered at LEP rates between 40 and 55 percent; Chinese and South Americans are clustered at LEP rates below 21 per-

Figure II-C. Relation Between Recent Immigration and English Proficiency

Each data point represents a given ancestry in a single state. For example, the point marked “A” refers to the population of Chinese ancestry in Nebraska, where 73 percent of the immigrant group arrived since 1990, and 17 percent are limited English proficient. On the other hand, point “B” refers to the population of Central American ancestry in Kentucky, where 74 percent of the immigrant group arrived since 1990 and 47 percent are limited English proficient.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



cent. Indeed, in only three cases does any group land between 21 and 40 percent; the divisions are thorough *and* wide.

Figure II-B is but one strand of a much larger and more consistent phenomenon, which can be seen in sharper detail when it is plotted along with similar categories. Figure II-C includes each occurrence where there are more than 100 immigrants of a selected ancestry in an individual state. The pattern is stark: regardless of the recency, Mexican and Central American immigrants have much higher rates of limited English proficiency than their Chinese or South American counterparts.

For instance, the results in the 60–64 percent category are similar to the results in the 65–69 percent

group. Data points representing Mexican and Central American ancestries are clustered between 50 and 60 percent LEP; Chinese and South American points are clustered between 10 and 20 percent LEP, with exceptions.

The pattern (if not the exact placement) is similar when moving down the recency scale. When considering populations where 50–54 percent of the population arrived between 1990 and March 2000, Mexicans and Central Americans are clustered between 45 and 50 percent LEP; Vietnamese are clustered between 30 and 40 percent; the other ancestries find the most data points between 15 and 30 percent LEP.

The English Acquisition Gap is prominent among the most recent immigrant groups, and cannot be explained by “issues” with the Spanish language.

While the previous conclusions demonstrated the prevalence of an English Acquisition Gap between similarly situated immigrant groups *between* states, that gap is also apparent when comparing similarly situated groups across the entire country.

Beginning with changes to immigration laws in 1965, the composition of immigration has undergone a seismic shift. Whereas the pre-1965 mix was disproportionately European in ancestry, the post-1965 mix dramatically increased migration from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.²⁰ Beginning in the 1970s, changes caused by Cold War conflict brought immigrants from Southeast Asia;²¹ by the end of the 1980s, the end of the Cold War accelerated migration from behind the now-lifted Iron Curtain.²²

The changes in law and geopolitics ensured that the overwhelming percentage of immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe arrived after 1980. For the sake of comparison, we selected ancestries with more than 300,000 immigrants in the United States according to the 2000 Census. Ancestries from English-speaking nations and those with more than 10 percent of the immigrant population arriving prior to 1965 were eliminated.

The 12 remaining ancestries and the rates at which their foreign-born speak English, are represented in Figure III-A.

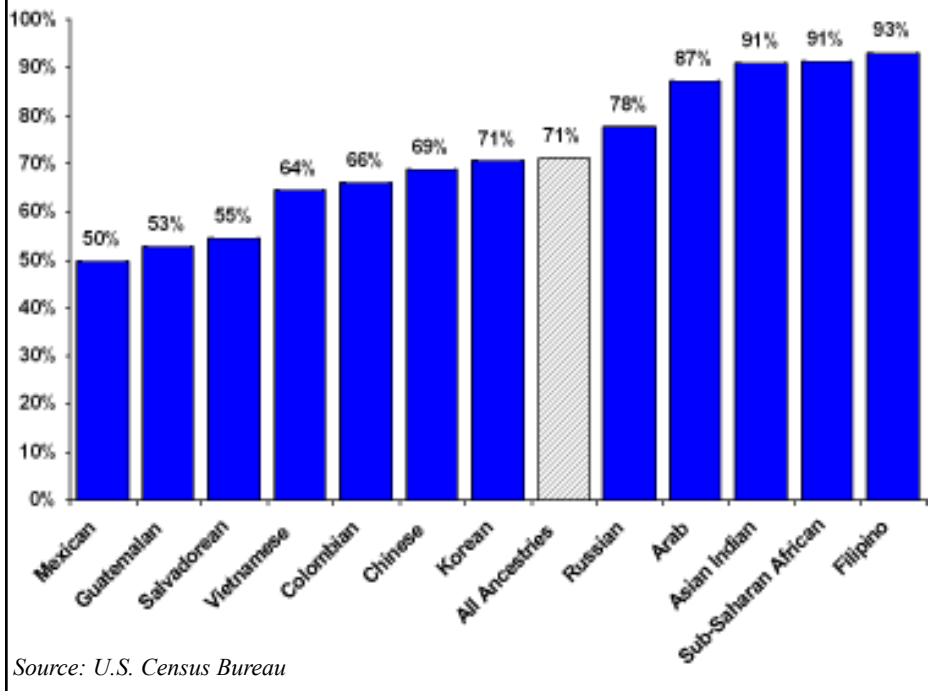
With the exception of India and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, none of these 12 nations has a history of colonization by an English-speaking country that would give the native populace substantial exposure to English. Indeed, the contact these countries have

had with English-speaking America has often been hostile.²³

Figure III-A demonstrates significant differences in English acquisition. Of the 12 ancestries studied, seven fall below the overall English proficiency average for all immigrants, although two ancestries are within two percentage points of the overall mean.

A wide gap exists even among those ancestries that fall below the mean. Immigrants born in China (69 percent), Colombia (66 percent) and Vietnam (64 percent) are more likely to be EP than those born in El Salvador (55 percent), Guatemala (53 percent), and Mexico (50 percent).

Figure III-A. English Proficiency Rates for Foreign-Born Residents of a Specified Ancestry



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Another way of thinking about the differences among these 12 nations is to compare how likely an ancestry is to speak English, relative to all other ancestries. In other words, if Ancestry A is 75 percent as likely to speak English as the national average for the foreign-born, it gets a Comparison Score of 0.75. If Ancestry B is 10 percent more likely to speak English than the national average, the Comparison Score is 1.10.

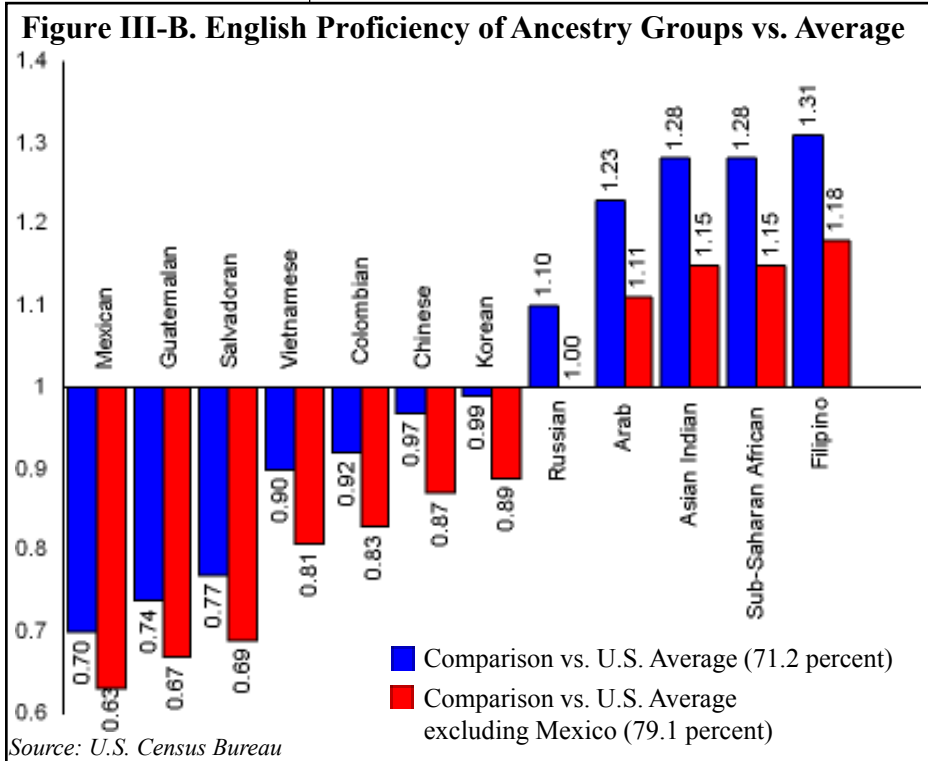
This metric is complicated by the low English acquisition rate of the ancestry with the greatest number of immigrants (Mexican). For instance, relative to the average of the *total* population, the foreign-

born of Mexican ancestry would achieve a Comparison Score of 0.70. But that number is somewhat misleading, in that the low acquisition rates among Mexicans lowers the national average from 79 percent proficiency to 71 percent proficiency, and biases any metric that compares them to the total population. With this statistical bias removed, and when compared to the non-Mexican foreign born, Mexicans achieve a Comparison Score of 0.63.

Figure III-B reflects this complication in the form of a dual comparison: one number comparing each of these nations to the total foreign-born population, and another number comparing each group to the total foreign-born population when Mexican ancestry is removed from the sample.

The results add dimension to Figure III-A, by indicating how much more (or less) likely an immigrant from a certain ancestry is to acquire English relative to his peers.

speak English at well above the national average: Panamanians (91 percent), Venezuelans (82 percent), and Argentineans (82 percent) demonstrate English proficiency at rates rivaling European immigrants.

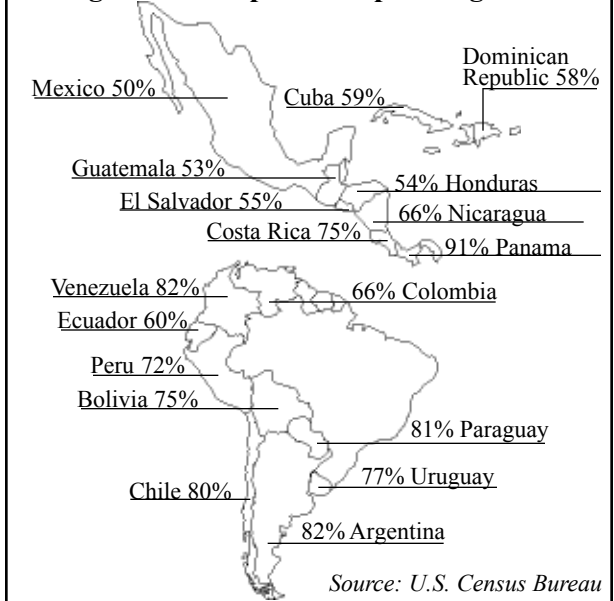


Spanish is Not the Explanation

While Hispanic immigrants from Mexico and Central America do not acquire English at the same rates as their counterparts, it cannot be concluded that the reason rests solely with the Spanish language. Were that the case, we would expect immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries in all of Central and South America to exhibit roughly the same linguistic tendencies, and they decidedly do not.

Figure III-C shows that the distribution of English proficiency among those from Spanish-speaking countries nearly mirrors that of the entire foreign-born population. (Figure I-A). Nine of the Spanish-speaking ancestries demonstrate English proficiency at above the 71 percent national average; nine do not. There are groups with substantial populations that

Figure III-C. English Proficiency Rates for U.S. Immigrants of Spanish Speaking Nations



There exists a Citizenship Acquisition Gap between Hispanic immigrants and immigrants of other ancestries.

Coming to the United States means different things for different people. Immigrants may come to escape persecution, to receive an education or to fill a specialized role in business. But for all, coming to America means a chance at success, a chance that often goes hand in hand with the two important measures of Americanization — acquiring proficiency in English and becoming a citizen.

Citizenship has an unending list of benefits, including voting, unrestricted travel, job attainment and sponsorship of immigrants.²⁴ More important, English acquisition allows an immigrant to participate fully in society, opening the door to higher incomes and a greater involvement in the community and in society. Given the benefits that flow from it, it is unsurprising that immigrants view the concept of citizenship quite favorably.²⁵

According to the Census, 25.6 percent of immigrants who entered the United States between 1980 and March 2000 had become naturalized as of the Census date. However, when comparing the naturalization rates for 12 major ancestries, many are markedly above and below this 25.6 percent rate (Figure IV-A). Immigrants from Vietnam (50 percent), the Philippines (48 percent), and China (40 percent) were all well above the average, while Salvadorans (19 percent), Guatemalans (15 percent) and Mexicans (13 percent) were naturalized far below the standard.

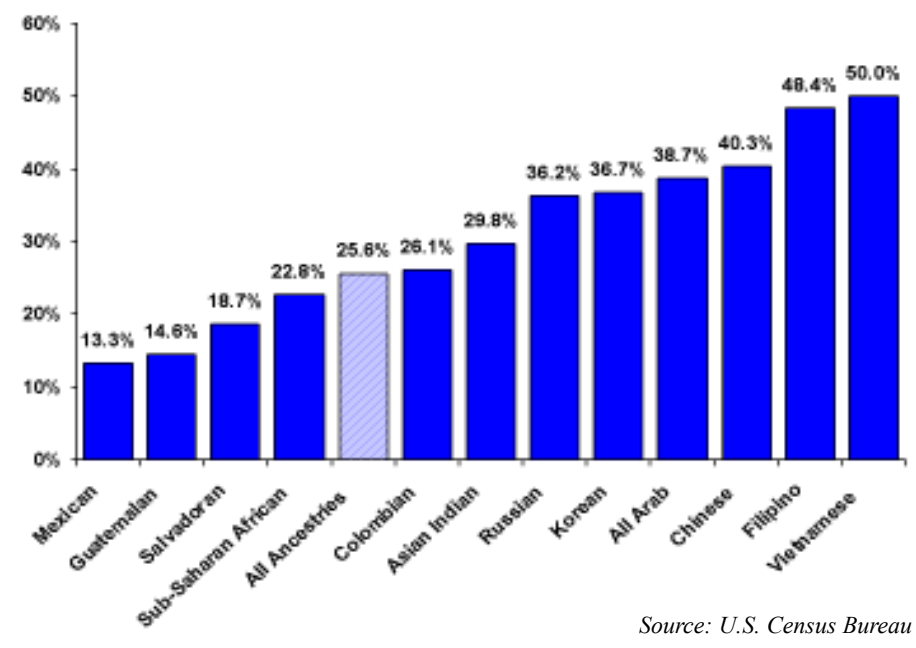
This phenomenon can be seen in sharper relief by looking at state-by-state maps, which chart citizenship by demographic group: states with redder tints demonstrate a lack of citizenship acquisition, while states with bluer tints demonstrate the attainment of

the civic ideal (Figure IV-B).

Just as Figure I-A illustrates different rates of linguistic integration, Figure IV-B provides a state-by-state, ancestry-by-ancestry snapshot of civic integration. While a glance at this map reflects that U.S. citizenship among Mexicans is typically separated by two or more shades from immigrants of Asian ancestry, a closer analysis also reveals:

- The citizenship rate for Mexican immigrants is exceeded by the citizenship rates of all four other groups in 46 states and the District of Columbia.
- The citizenship rate for those of Mexican ancestry is less than 20 percent in 45 states and the District of Columbia, and falls below 10 percent in seven of these jurisdictions (DE, GA, NJ, NY, NC, SC, DC).
- Outside of Mexican immigrants in these seven areas, there are no examples of any other ancestry group within any state achieving citizenship at a rate

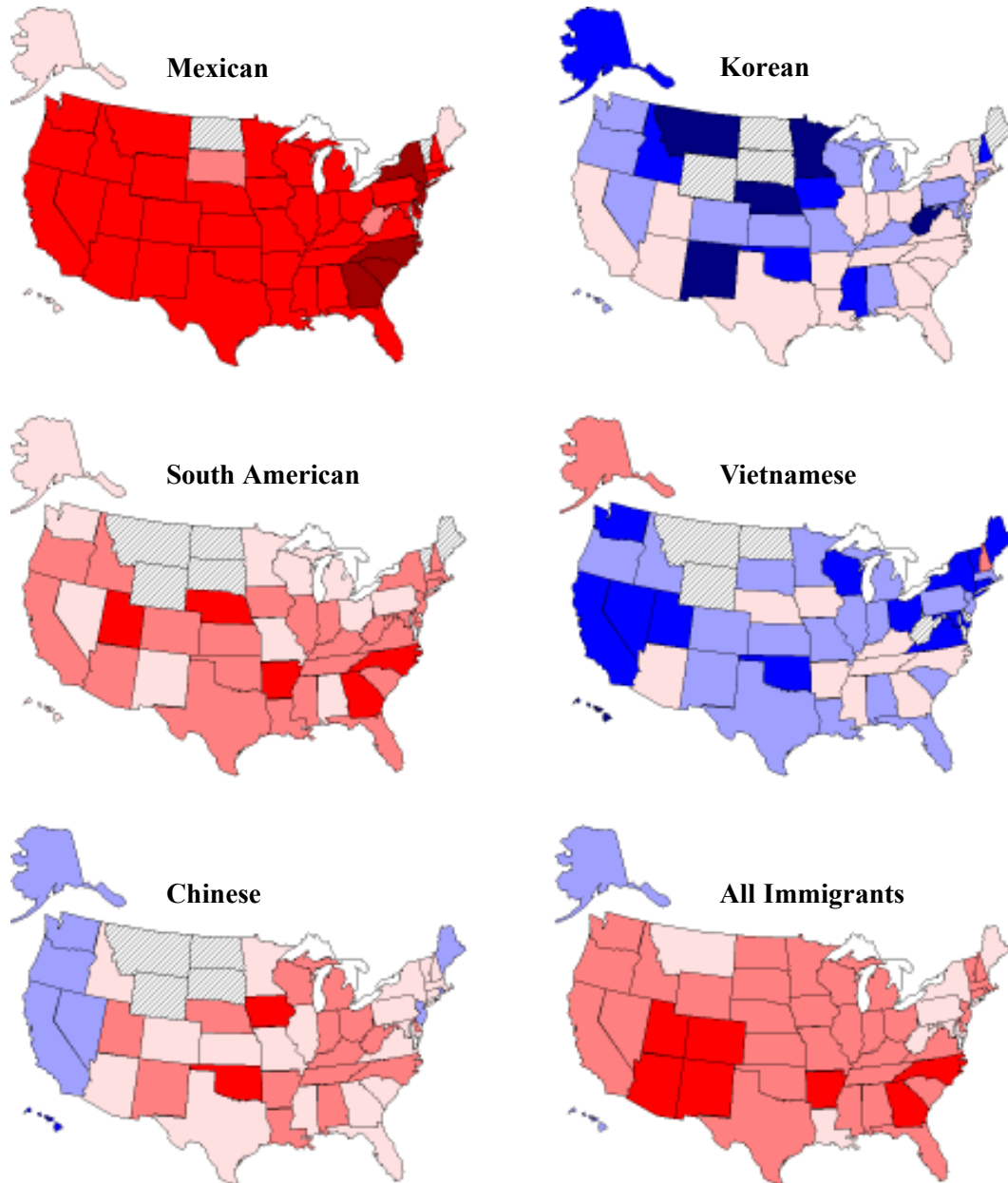
Figure IV-A. Naturalization Rates of Immigrants who Arrived Between 1980 and March 2000, by Ancestry



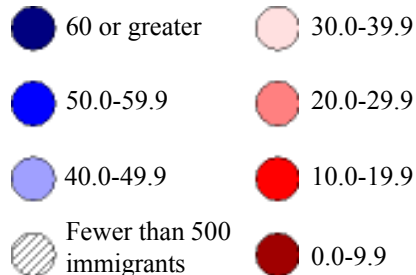
of less than 10 percent. In fact, there are only seven examples of any other group falling short of 20 percent.

- The highest rate of citizenship for Mexicans in any state was 37.93 percent (Hawaii). Chinese immigrants exceeded this figure in 14 states, Korean immigrants in 32 states and Vietnamese immigrants in 36 states.

Figure IV-B. Naturalization Rates of Immigrants who Arrived Between 1980 and March 2000, by Ancestry

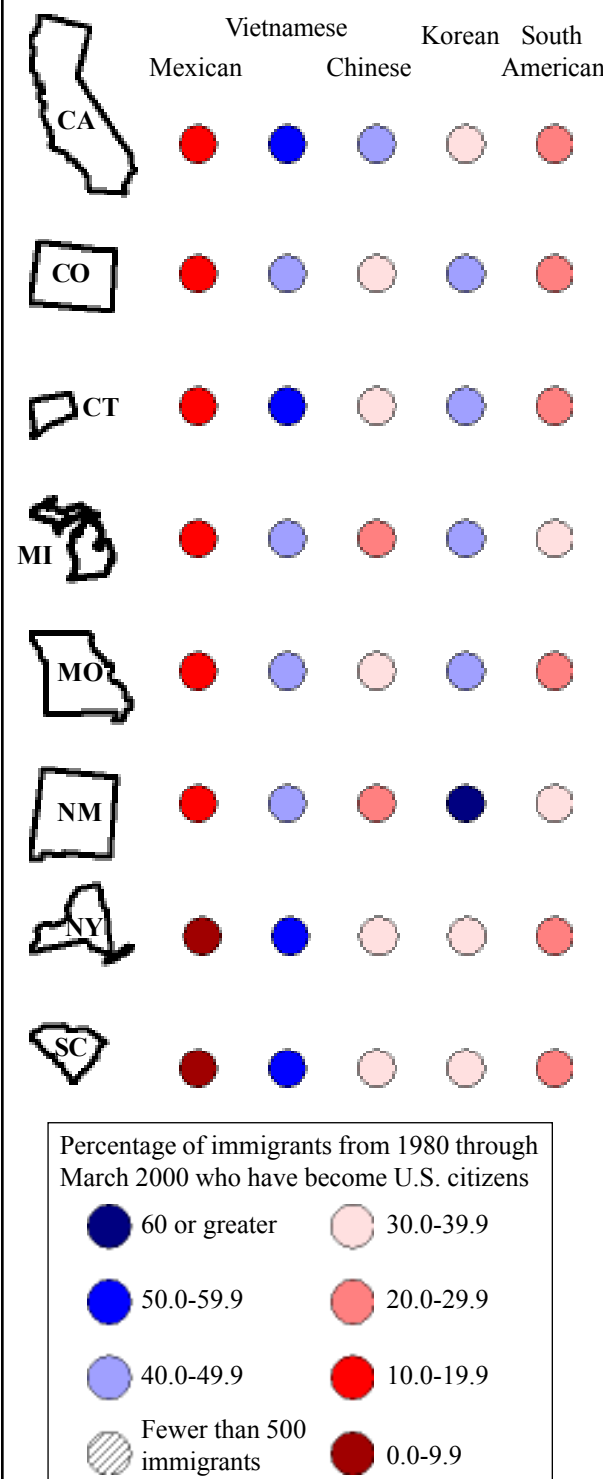


Percentage of immigrants from 1980 through March 2000 who have become U.S. citizens



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure IV-C. Naturalization Rates of Immigrants who Arrived Between 1980 and March 2000, by Ancestry, in Selected States



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The picture is sharpened further by comparing the rates among various ancestries in several diverse states (Figure IV-C). In each case, the reddest tint is found among Mexican immigrants, with the four comparison ancestries achieving higher rates of citizenship.

In New York, the first home of newcomers for generations, just nine percent of Mexican immigrants achieve citizenship; the numbers for Vietnamese (50 percent), Chinese (37 percent), and Koreans (30 percent) are markedly higher. Similarly, in the immigrant gateway of California, just 13 percent of Mexican immigrants achieve citizenship; the numbers for Vietnamese (56 percent), Chinese (49 percent), and Koreans (34 percent) are far higher.

In discussions of Electoral College maps, Missouri is often cited as a bellwether state. So too with citizenship rates, where the rate for Mexicans (13 percent) mirrors the weighted national average, and lags several shades behind the acquisition rates for Asian immigrants.

The gap is evident when comparing the rates in a quintessential electoral map Red State (South Carolina) and Blue State (Connecticut). In South Carolina, Mexicans are naturalized at rates (8 percent) that are less than one-fourth of Vietnamese (47 percent), Chinese (30 percent), and Koreans (32 percent); similarly, the numbers in Connecticut are 12 percent for Mexicans, less than a third of the rate of Vietnamese (52 percent), Chinese (36 percent), and Koreans (43 percent).

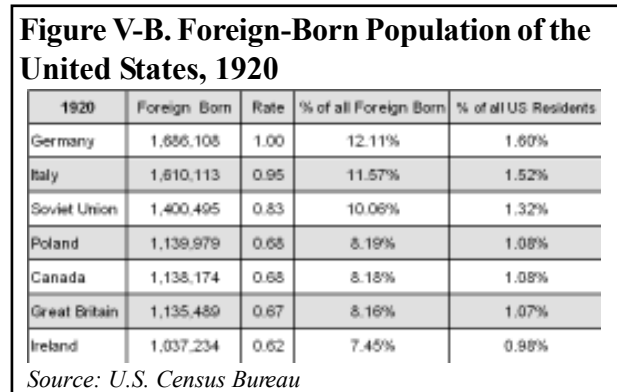
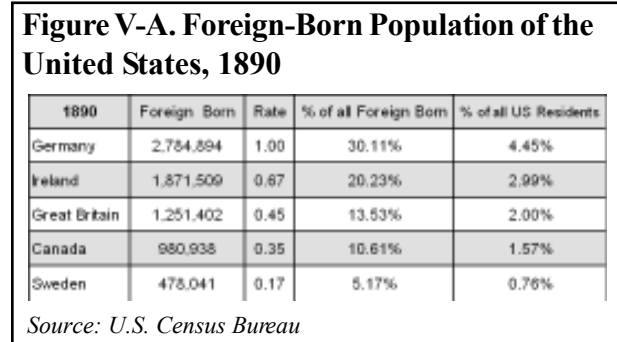
Of the 42 states and Washington, DC, with at least 500 immigrants of each ancestry, only the nation's capital displayed a variance of less than 20 percentage points between the most naturalized ancestry group and the least. More than three-quarters of the states had a gap of more than 30 percentage points, and 11 states exhibited a difference of 40 percentage points or more.

Overall, one cannot help but notice the similarities in the demographic hues between the language maps (Figure I-A) and the citizenship maps (Figure IV-B); there is a strong link between linguistic and civic integration. That these two factors interrelate does not firmly establish a causal connection, but the broad and consistent correlation does establish at least a *prima facie* case that the two are linked.

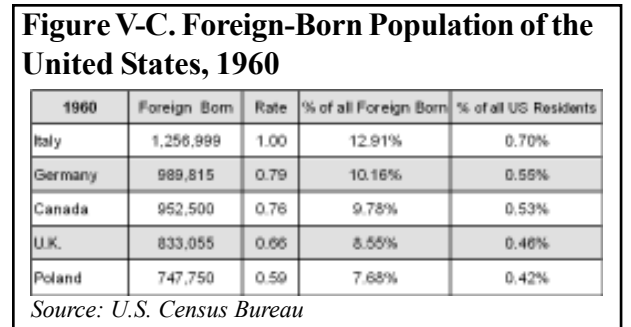
The English Acquisition Gap may be explained in part by the phenomenon of Demographic Dominance.

While immigrants comprise as great a share of the population today as in earlier eras, no single group has ever stood out as demographically dominant.²⁶ In 1890, when 2.8 million German-born immigrants represented the largest foreign-born contingent in U.S. history (and would continue to hold the high-water mark until 4.3 million Mexicans were noted in 1990), they were joined in the foreign-born ranks by 1.9 million Irish, 1.3 million Britons and 1.0 million Canadians (Figure V-A). Even Swedes, the fifth-highest contingent of foreign born, held five percent of the foreign-born population.

Thirty years later, in 1920, the Census found that six different nations were the country of origin to eight percent or more of the U.S. foreign-born population. Seven nations had sent more than a million individuals to America’s shores. But none was dominant. There was nearly one Italian for every German, one Canadian for every Pole. Even seventh place Ireland had three-fifths the population of first place Germany. Mexico’s contingent of 486,000, tenth on the list of nations of origin, was nearly 30 percent of Germany’s (Figure V-B).



America’s foreign-born population may have dwindled by 1960, but it had dwindled proportionately. Between 1930 and 1960, the number of immigrants in the United States dropped from a then-record 14.2 million to 9.7 million, a decline of 31 percent.²⁷ However, six different nations each accounted for more than seven percent of the foreign born and none accounted for more than Italy’s 12.9 percent (Figure V-C).



The lack of demographic dominance by any ancestry between 1880 and 1960 well explains why English remained the common language of the United States. English’s status as the de facto national language would likely have been undermined by demographic and sociological shifts that resulted in one or more other languages achieving roughly co-equal status with English. But where several languages of substantially similar demographic prominence diluted that challenge, any effort would be less likely to succeed.

Conversely, if the demographics overwhelmingly featured immigration from a single language group, that language group would almost certainly be relatively less likely to adopt English as its language. If the Italians, Russians, and Poles of 1920 had been replaced by Germans, German would have likely achieved a primary status among the non-English languages in the United States. Instead, German was just one of many foreign tongues spoken in the country at that time; there was little chance that society would evolve to accommodate it as a de facto “second national language.”

By the time of the 1970 Census, fewer than five percent of Americans were foreign born.²⁸ U.S. immigration had cooled so significantly that Italy, which was the most common country of origin with 1.01 million immigrants, would have placed eighth in 1920 (Figure V-B).

Today, a far different picture emerges. The 9.2 million Mexican-born residents of the U.S. is *more than the second- through tenth-place nations combined*.²⁹ It's nearly seven times that of the second-place nation, the Philippines and almost nine times that of third-place India (Figures V-D and V-E). The combined foreign-born populations of the second through fourth nations, those that would be able to mitigate the growth of a second national language, are lower than at any time from 1890–1930, a time when the U.S. population was 25–40 percent of today's total.

Not only does 9.2 million represent the highest number of foreign born from any country recorded in any census, but also is 113 percent higher than the 1990 figure.³⁰ In fact, this doubling between 1990 and 2000 followed a 95-percent increase from 1980 to 1990³¹ and a 189-percent jump from 1970 to 1980.³² All told, in the span of 30 years, Mexicans have gone from representing 7.9 percent of America's foreign-born residents and 0.4 percent of the overall U.S. population to 29.5 percent and 3.3 percent.

To put this in perspective, consider that a century has passed since the last time a single nation represented such a high percentage of the foreign-born population and of the American population as a whole. In 1890, Germans made up 30.1 percent of the foreign born and 4.4 percent of the American population (Figure V-A), with numbers dropping a decade later to 25.8 percent and 3.5 percent, respectively.³³ There is no such trend among Mexicans; interim Census reports suggest that the number will be higher in 2010.³⁴

When language is considered, the current condition of Demographic Dominance may be *understated*. In 1890, for instance, nationality and

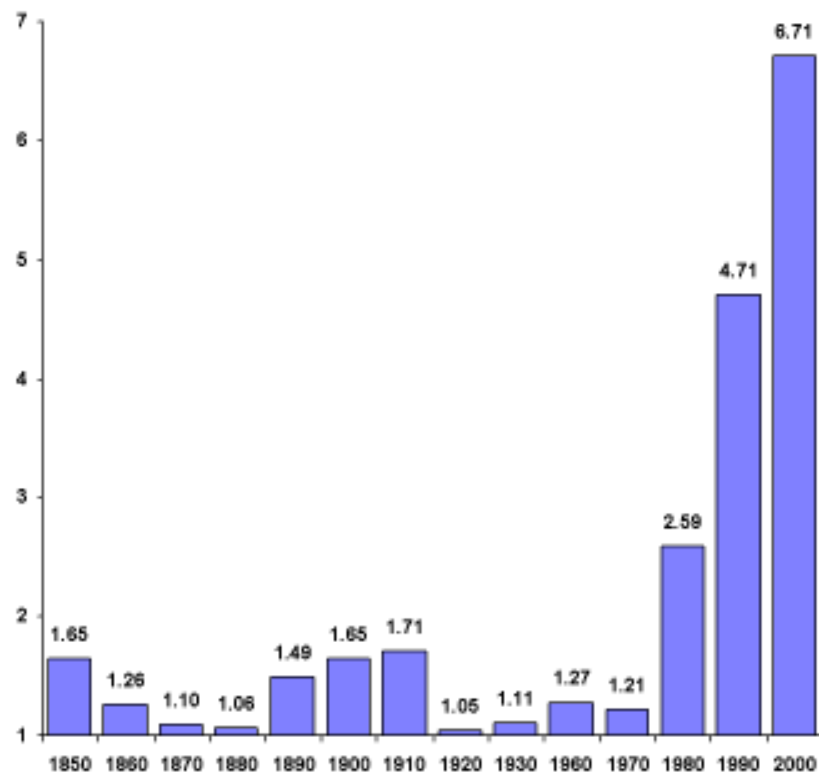
Figure V-D. Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 2000

2000	Foreign Born	Rate	% of all Foreign Born	% of all US Residents
Mexico	9,177,487	1.00	29.50%	3.26%
Philippines	1,369,070	0.15	4.40%	0.49%
India	1,022,552	0.11	3.29%	0.36%
China	988,857	0.11	3.18%	0.35%
Vietnam	988,174	0.11	3.18%	0.35%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

language were essentially identical demographic categories. The pool of German-speaking immigrants came almost exclusively from Germany, with few other nations adding to the large population of German speakers. Today, there are 9.2 million immigrants of Mexican ancestry, but there are an additional 5 million from countries whose populations primarily speak Spanish.³⁵ If counted as a single category, those of Spanish-speaking ancestry would have a ratio of more than nine to one when compared to the second-place non-English-speaking group.

Figure V-E. Ratio of the Population of the Most Common Country of Origin for American Immigrants to the Second Most Common Country of Origin for American Immigrants, 1850–2000*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

* - Country of origin data was not collected by the Census in 1940 and 1950

Conclusion

This study represents a snapshot of the state of linguistic and civic integration at one point in our history. Given the dynamism of our long immigration experiment, it would be unwise to draw absolute conclusions about what lies ahead.

Still, the current picture gives ample reason for both hope and concern. Immigrants—whatever their ancestry—are unquestionably capable of learning English. But a variety of factors may be colluding to make linguistic and civic integration less likely among Hispanic immigrants.

Our hope is that this research will stimulate the nation's leaders to make a concerted effort to assist immigrants in learning English and becoming citizens. If our will is strong, today's generation of immigrants will be tomorrow's generation of great Americans.

Endnotes

- 1 – Schneider, William. “Which Way Do You Cut It.” *The National Journal*. August 2004.
- 2 – Educational Testing Service. *A Human Capital Concern: The Literacy Proficiency of U.S. Immigrants*. March 2004.
- 3 – U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *English Literacy and Language Minorities in the United States*. August 2001.
- 4 – Educational Testing Service. *A Human Capital Concern: The Literacy Proficiency of U.S. Immigrants*. March 2004.
- 5 – Ibid.
- 6 – Borjas, George. *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy*. Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press. 2001.
- 7 – Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon; “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990,” published Feb. 1999, < <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>> and U.S. Census Bureau; “2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 4,” generated by Rob Toonkel; using American Fact Finder; < <http://factfinder.census.gov>>; (17 August 2004).
- 8 – Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation. “2002 National Survey of Latinos”. Washington, D.C.. 2002.
- 9 – Huntington, Samuel. “One Nation, Out of Many.” *The American Enterprise*. Sep 2004. 8 Sep 2004 <<http://www.taemag.com>>.
- 10 – When examining the foreign born population that speaks English less than well, 51 percent are Mexican, four percent are Cuban and 13 percent are of other ancestries that are likely to be Spanish speaking. U.S. Census Bureau; “2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 4,” generated by Rob Toonkel; using American Fact Finder; < <http://factfinder.census.gov>>; (17 August 2004).
- 11 – Huntington, Samuel. “The Hispanic Challenge.” *Foreign Policy* Mar/Apr 2004. 11 Aug 2004 <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=2495> and “Huntington and Hispanics: Letters.” *Foreign Policy*. May/June 2004. 30 Aug 2004 <<http://www.foreignpolicy.com>>.

- 12 – Huntington has been criticized for a lack of empirical evidence for many of his claims, but the typical empirical riposte to the claim that “Hispanics are not learning English” is that second-generation Hispanics learn English at rates approaching 100 percent. In our view, the focus on only second-generation immigrants entirely misses the point. The data from Census 2000 prove that learning English is quite common among first-generation immigrants, but it is more common among some ancestries than others.
- 13 – The U.S. Census Bureau defines those who speak English “less than very well” as “limited English proficient” based on research in conjunction with the English Language Proficiency Survey of 1982. In this survey, the Census studied the relationship between the self-reported responses of the English-ability question and test scores from a more detailed exam. Individuals who reported speaking a language other than English at home, yet speaking English “very well,” passed the exam at a rate similar to that of persons who spoke English at home. Respondents who reported that they spoke English “well,” “not well” or “not at all” had significantly higher rates of failure.
- 14 – According to the Census, 225.3 million people reported at least one ancestry, including 62.0 million who indicated multiple ancestries. U.S. Census Bureau; Ancestry: 2000; <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/c2kbr-35.pdf>>; (accessed: 14 July 2004)
- 15 – Ibid.
- 16 – U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service; Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population the United States: 1990 to 2000 <http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/III_Report_1211.pdf>; (accessed: 11 August 2004)
- 17 – U.S. Census Bureau; The Foreign Born Population: 2000; < <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-34.pdf>>; (accessed: 14 July 2004)
- 18 – U.S. Census Bureau; Ancestry: 2000; <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/c2kbr-35.pdf>>; (accessed: 14 July 2004)
- 19 – U.S. Census Bureau; “2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 4,” generated by Rob Toonkel; using American Fact Finder; < <http://factfinder.census.gov>>; (17 August 2004).
- 20 – Daniels, Roger. *Guarding the Golden Door : American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882*. New York. Hill and Wang, 2004.
- 21 – Ibid.
- 22 – Ibid.
- 23 – The fight against communism led the United States into armed conflict (Korea and Vietnam), or to fund armed proxies (El Salvador). Immigrants and refugees from these conflicts have shown the United States sufficient good will to come to our shores; but in each case, a military presence in the home country has not led to a cultural presence that would have given them a head start in learning the English language.
- 24 – U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, *A Guide to Naturalization*. Feb. 2004; <<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/English.pdf>>.
- 25 – National Latino Immigrant Survey. NALEO Educational Fund. 1989.
- 26 – From 1850, when the Census first collected country of origin data, through 1970 (excluding 1940 and 1950 when the Census did not collect country of origin data), the population of the most populous foreign-born group never exceeded the combined population of the second and third most populous foreign-born group. Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon; “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990,” published Feb. 1999, < <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>>

- 27 – The immigrant population of the United States was 14,207,149 in 1930, topping the previous high of 13,920,692 in 1920. The foreign-born population dropped to 11,594,896 in 1940, 10,347,395 in 1950 and 9,738,091 in 1960, the last figure the lowest since 1890. Ibid.
- 28 – The 1970 Census found 9,619,302 foreign-born residents out of a total population of 203,210,158, (4.73 percent). Ibid.
- 29 – The total population of the second- through tenth-place nations of birth for foreign-born American residents was 8,450,305, compared to the 9,177,487 American residents born in Mexico. The second-through tenth-place nations were, in order: Philippines, India, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Korea, Canada, El Salvador and Germany. U.S. Census Bureau; “2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 4;” generated by Rob Toonkel; using American Fact Finder; <<http://factfinder.census.gov>>; (17 August 2004).
- 30 – The 1990 Census found 4,298,014 American residents who were born in Mexico. The 2000 Census found 9,177,487 American residents born in Mexico, for an increase of 113 percent. Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon; “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990;” published Feb. 1999, < <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>> and U.S. Census Bureau; “2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 4;” generated by Rob Toonkel; using American Fact Finder; < <http://factfinder.census.gov>>; (17 August 2004).
- 31 – The 1980 Census found 2,199,221 American residents who were born in Mexico. The 1990 Census found 4,298,014 American residents born in Mexico, for an increase of 95 percent. Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon; “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990;” published Feb. 1999, < <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>>.
- 32 – The 1970 Census found 759,711 American residents who were born in Mexico. The 1980 Census found 2,199,221 American residents born in Mexico, for an increase of 189 percent. Ibid.
- 33 – The 1900 Census found 2,663,418 American residents who were born in Germany. The total American population was 75,944,575 in 1900, with a total foreign-born population of 10,341,276. Ibid.
- 34 – Table 3: Annual Estimates of the Population by Sex, Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2003 (NC-EST2003-03). Source: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau.
- 35 – Other Spanish-speaking nations with high immigrant populations in the United States in 2000 included: Cuba (872,716 immigrants), El Salvador (817,336), Dominican Republic (687,677), Colombia (509,872), Guatemala (480,665), Ecuador (298,626), Honduras (282,852), Peru (278,186), Nicaragua (220,335), Argentina (125,218), Venezuela (107,031), Panama (105,177), Chile (80,804), Costa Rica (71,870). The total population of immigrants from these countries is 4,938,365. U.S. Census Bureau; “2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 4;” generated by Rob Toonkel; using American Fact Finder; < <http://factfinder.census.gov>>; (17 August 2004).

Figure VI-A. Most populous immigrant ancestry groups in the United States and the percentage who are English Proficient (EP), 2000

Ancestry	Population	Pct. EP
Mexican	8,520,525	49.9%
Chinese	1,698,644	68.8%
Asian Indian	1,333,570	91.1%
Filipino	1,324,670	93.1%
West Indian	1,184,371	93.0%
Vietnamese	884,487	64.4%
Cuban	852,384	59.0%
Korean	843,743	70.6%
German	713,202	98.1%
Italian	602,810	86.1%
Sub-Saharan African	587,749	91.3%
Dominican	541,507	57.6%
Salvadoran	531,579	54.7%
Jamaican	488,065	99.5%
Polish	484,247	80.8%
Arab	480,449	87.5%
English	443,779	99.5%
Russian	407,049	78.0%
Colombian	373,112	66.2%
Haitian	359,315	78.4%
Japanese	329,728	78.4%
Guatemalan	312,282	52.8%
Irish	268,803	99.4%
Canadian	253,868	99.1%
Ukrainian	242,571	70.7%
Portuguese	240,034	74.2%
Iranian	230,503	86.1%
French	211,373	95.2%
Ecuadorian	205,315	60.4%
British	200,244	99.7%
Peruvian	191,758	71.8%
Honduran	184,926	53.5%
African	183,862	91.5%
Greek	177,289	84.3%
Armenian	170,063	74.8%
Nat. Hawaiian/Other Pac. Isl.	158,909	84.1%
Pakistani	151,519	87.7%
Nicaraguan	149,601	65.6%
Scottish	148,532	99.7%
Cambodian	135,436	65.7%
Brazilian	132,545	74.4%
Yugoslavian	129,423	71.0%
Guyanese	128,836	99.6%
Laotian	128,806	68.2%
Dutch	125,974	98.9%
Trinidadian & Tobagonian	122,533	99.6%
Romanian	118,929	86.5%
French-Canadian	117,657	96.7%
Taiwanese	112,984	78.9%
Hungarian	109,841	93.2%
Latin American Indian	103,216	58.5%
Nigerian	102,780	97.4%
Hmong	100,219	64.7%
Thai	98,486	83.0%
Lebanese	98,089	89.5%
Egyptian	91,004	90.4%
Argentinean	81,167	81.6%

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