



Demographic Trends of Children of Immigrants

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Children of immigrants make up a substantial and growing proportion of the US population. As such, it is critical to examine the demographic characteristics of this population and understand the strengths they possess and the barriers they face. Children of immigrants make up one-quarter of all children and account for all growth in the child population between 2006 and 2014. Below, we present findings on population growth, variation across region of origin, language abilities, educational attainment, and poverty and low-income rates.

This brief uses data from the 2014 American Community Survey to update “Children of Immigrants: 2013 State Trends Update” (Woods et al. 2016). These statistics can be found on the Children of Immigrants Data Tool website,¹ and interactive maps displaying this data over time and by state and metro area can be found on the Children of Immigrants Interactive Maps website.²

The Population of Children of Immigrants Grew while the Population of Children of Native-Born Parents Shrank

- Continuing a steady trend of population growth, the number of children under age 18 with at least one foreign-born parent increased from 15.7 million in 2006 to 17.7 million in 2014, a 12 percent increase over that period.
- In contrast, the population of children of native-born parents has steadily decreased, dropping 3 percent from 55.6 million in 2006 to 54.1 million in 2014.

- Consequently, the percentage of children with immigrant parents in the United States was 24 percent in 2014, up from 21 percent in 2006.

Most Children of Immigrants Are Native Born

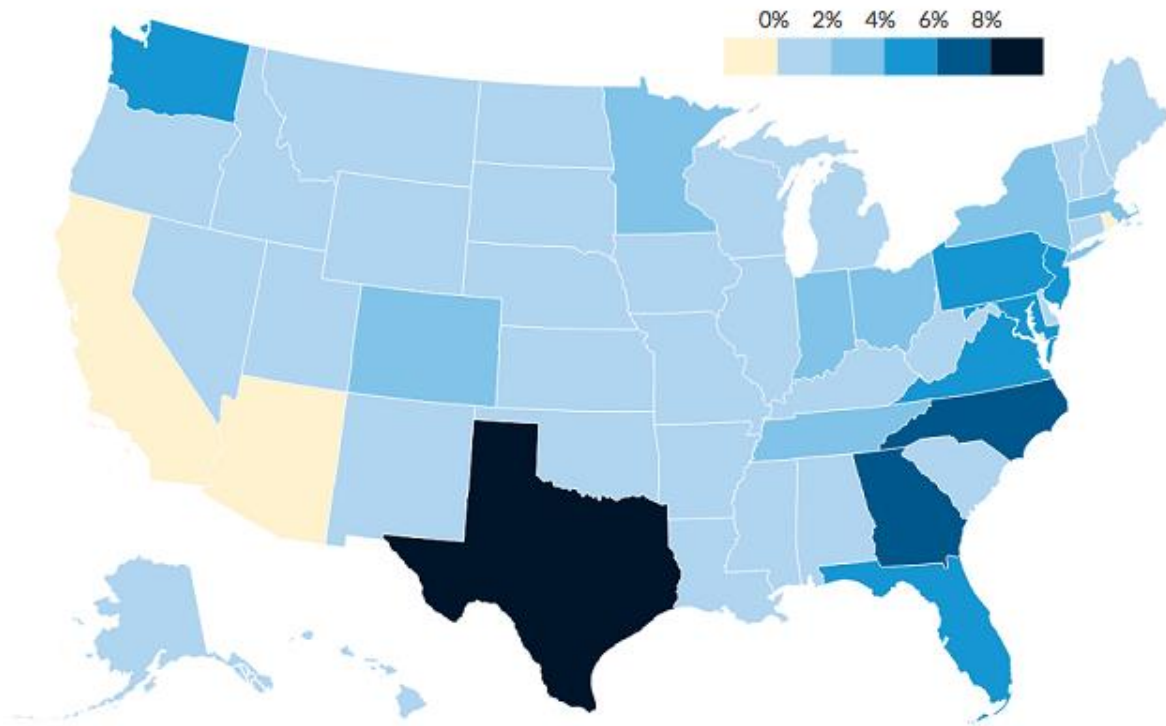
- The vast majority of children of immigrants (88 percent) in 2014 were born in the United States, up from 84 percent in 2006. As a result, almost all children of immigrants (91 percent) are US citizens.
- In addition, most children of immigrants (59 percent) have parents who are US citizens, up from 57 percent in 2006. Most children of immigrants (72 percent) have parents who were in the United States for more than 5 years before their child was born, and many children (19 percent) have parents who were in the United States for more than 20 years.

The Population of Children of Immigrants Is Growing in Nontraditional Immigrant Destinations

- While most children of immigrants (62 percent) continue to live in the six traditional immigrant destination states (California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey), 77 percent of net growth in the population is occurring in other states (figure 1).³
 - » The state with the most growth over this time period was Texas, which accounted for 21 percent of net growth. Georgia accounted for 8 percent of total growth and North Carolina accounted for 7 percent. Virginia, Washington, Maryland, New Jersey, and Florida each accounted for 5 percent of growth.
 - » Although the number of children of immigrants grew in most states, three states actually saw declining numbers. Notably, the number of children of immigrants in California fell substantially from 4.6 million in 2006 to 4.4 million in 2014. This decrease is almost entirely driven by Los Angeles, which saw a decline of almost 400,000 children of immigrants over this period. Rhode Island and Arizona experienced very small declines of less than 5,000. Both California and Rhode Island also experienced declines in the total population of all children.

FIGURE 1

Net Growth of Children of Immigrants by State, 2006–14

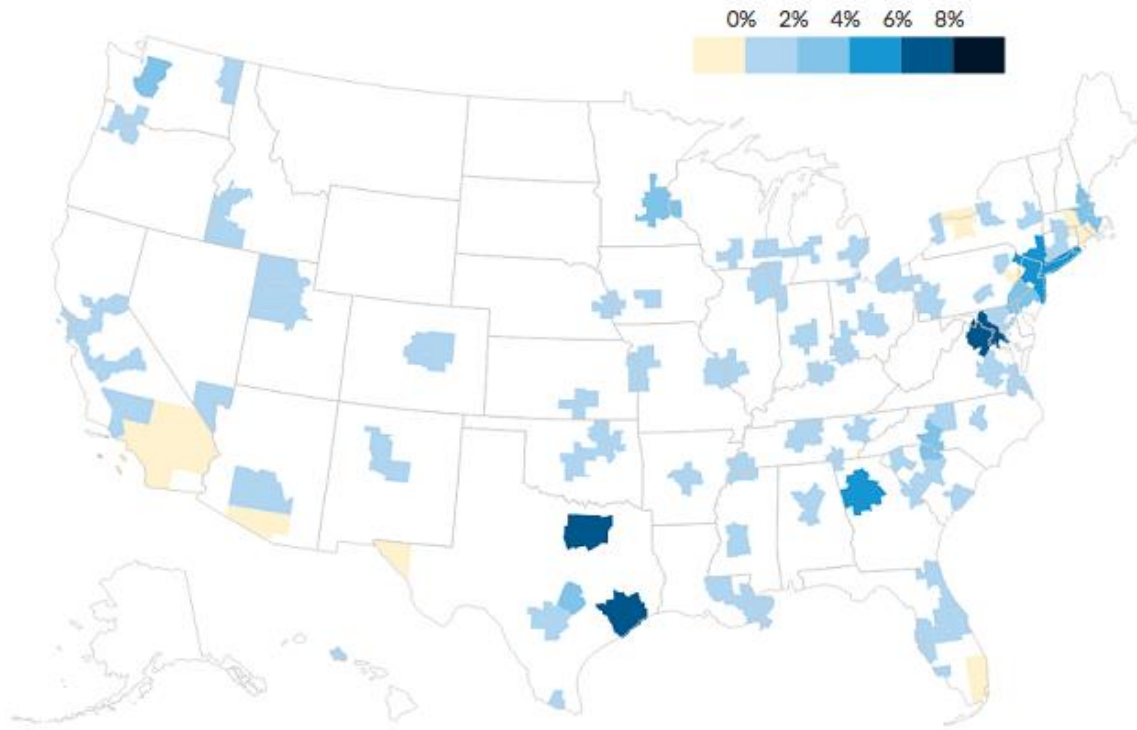


Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2013 and 2014 American Community Surveys.

- Similarly, although almost half (47 percent) of all children of immigrants live in just 10 metropolitan areas (New York; Los Angeles; Chicago; Houston; Miami; Dallas; Washington, DC; San Francisco; Riverside, CA; and Atlanta), 56 percent of net growth since 2006 has occurred in other metropolitan areas (figure 2).
 - » The five metropolitan areas accounting for the most growth since 2006 are all traditional destinations: Dallas (7 percent), Houston (7 percent), Washington, DC (7 percent), Atlanta (5 percent), and New York (5 percent). However, the number of destinations for children of immigrants has diversified in recent years. For example, Seattle, Philadelphia, and Austin, TX, each account for 3 percent of the net growth of children of immigrants, and seven other nontraditional destinations each account for 2 percent: Charlotte, NC; Minneapolis; Baltimore; Las Vegas; Nashville; and Portland, OR.
 - » Similar to state trends, 10 metropolitan areas also experienced negative growth between 2006 and 2014. Most of this decline took place in Los Angeles, as described above. Other metro areas that experienced declines between 10,000 and 15,000 children of immigrants include Miami; El Paso, TX; Providence, RI; and Riverside, CA.

FIGURE 2

Net Growth of Children of Immigrants by Metropolitan Area, 2006–14



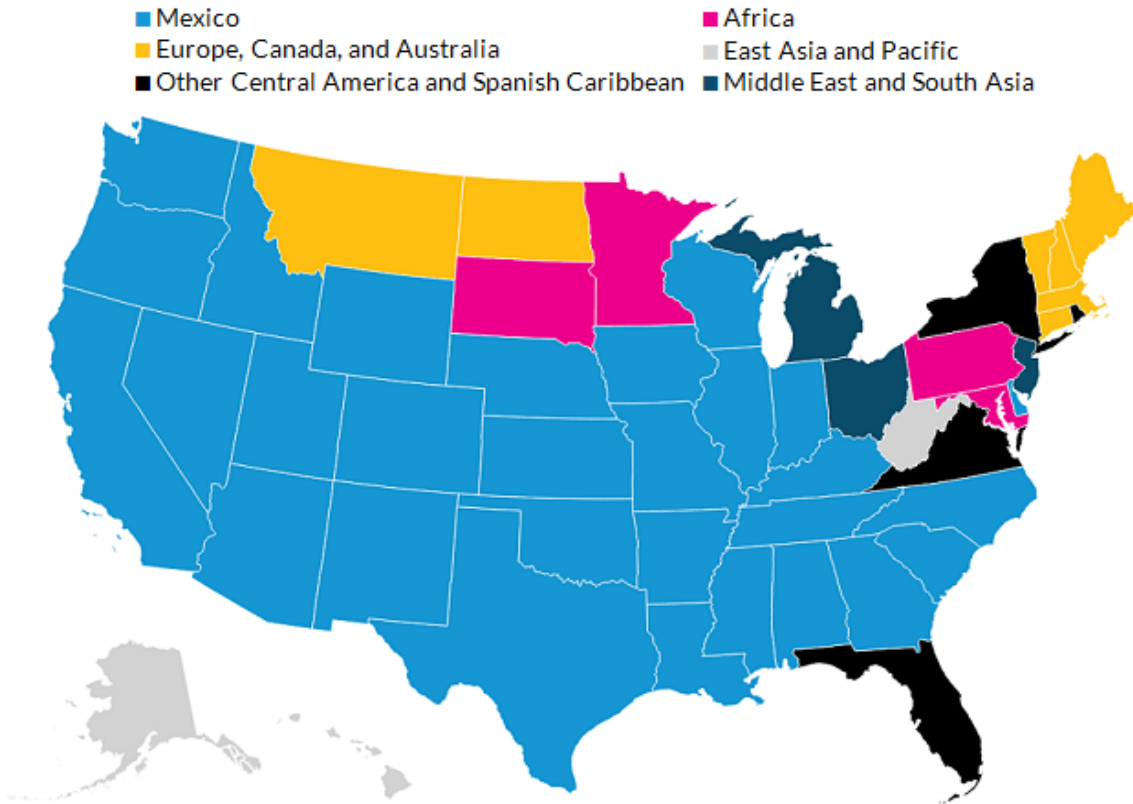
Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2013 and 2014 American Community Surveys.

Wide Regional Variation in Parental Country of Origin

- Most children of immigrants have parents from Mexico (40 percent) or Central America (11 percent). Children with parents from Mexico accounted for 32 percent of growth in the number of children of immigrants. Although children with parents from the Middle East and South Asia made up only about 9 percent of all children of immigrants, they accounted for 23 percent of growth. Children with parents from Central America accounted for another 17 percent and children with parents from Africa accounted for 13 percent.
- » The geographic distribution of children of immigrants by country of origin also varies widely. Figure 3 shows the most prevalent country of origin for immigrant parents in each state. Across the United States, Mexico is the most common country of origin, especially in the West and Southwest. Africa is the most common region of origin in Maryland, Minnesota, and South Dakota. The Middle East and South Asia are most common in Michigan, Ohio, and New Jersey, and Central America is the most common region in Florida, the District of Columbia, New York, and Rhode Island.

FIGURE 3

Most Common Parental Region of Origin by State, 2014



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2013 and 2014 American Community Surveys.

Children of Immigrants Are More Likely to Be Bilingual

- Although 59 percent have at least one parent who is limited English proficient, almost all children of immigrants (86 percent) are English proficient. The majority (56 percent) are also bilingual, defined as being English proficient and speaking another language at home. This high rate of bilingualism highlights an important strength of children of immigrants that may provide positive benefits to future work and earnings.
- Bilingual children of immigrants speak a wide range of languages. The most prevalent language is Spanish, with 71 percent of bilingual children of immigrants speaking Spanish at home. The next biggest language groups are Hindi and other related languages (4 percent), Chinese languages (3 percent), and Arabic languages, French, and Vietnamese (all at 2 percent).

Children of Immigrants Are Equally Likely to Be Enrolled in School

- Fewer children of immigrants (74 percent) have parents with a high school degree than children of native-born parents (94 percent). However, these numbers are an improvement for both groups relative to 2006, an encouraging sign.
- Although children of immigrants are less likely than their peers to have parents with a high school degree, they are just as likely as children of native-born parents to be enrolled in school from ages 6 to 17 (98 percent of both groups). At age 17, 93 percent of children of immigrants whose parents do not have a high school degree remain enrolled; suggesting that most will attain a higher level of education than their parents.

More Children of Immigrants Are Poor or Low-Income

- Children of immigrants are more likely to be poor (i.e., to live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level) than children of native-born parents. In 2014, 25 percent of children of immigrants lived in poor families, compared to 19 percent of children of native-born parents. The poverty rate among children of immigrants has fallen in recent years from a high of 27 percent in 2012. However, poverty rates for both groups are higher than in 2006, when 22 percent of children of immigrants and 16 percent of children of native-born parents lived in poor families.
- Similarly, children of immigrants are also more likely to live in low-income families (with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level) than children of native-born parents. Over half (54 percent) of children of immigrants lived in low-income households in 2014, compared to 39 percent of children of native-born parents. This is a slight increase from 2006 (51 percent of children of immigrants and 36 percent of children of native-born parents). Similar to the spike and recent decline seen among poor families, the percentage of children of immigrants living in low-income households has fallen since 2011, when it reached a high of 56 percent.

Conclusion

These findings paint a picture of the state of children of immigrants in the United States. It is clear that patterns of growth vary widely across states and metropolitan areas, especially regarding region of origin, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach to serving children of immigrants cannot address their various needs. Place matters for immigrant integration, and local and state policymakers must pay attention to the characteristics and needs of their immigrant populations. As a fast-growing portion of the child population in the United States, children of immigrants are the future of America's workforce.

Policies must work to support their strengths, such as high levels of bilingualism, and overcome their challenges, including high rates of economic hardship.

Notes

1. “Children of Immigrants Data Tool,” Urban Institute, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://webapp.urban.org/charts/datatool/pages.cfm>.
2. Devlin Hanson, “Visualizing Trends for Children of Immigrants,” Urban Institute, last updated October 2016, <http://apps.urban.org/features/children-of-immigrants/>.
3. Net percent growth of each state and metropolitan area was calculated by dividing the numerical growth of children of immigrants in each location between 2006-2014 by the total growth of children of immigrants in the United States over the same time period, then multiplying by 100.

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