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Study Foresees the Fall of an Immigration Record That Has Lasted a Century

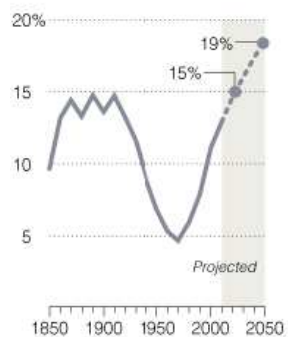
By SAM ROBERTS
Published: February 12, 2008

If present trends continue, within two decades the nation's foreign-born population will surpass the historic 19th-century peak of nearly 15 percent of all residents, according to projections released Monday.

A Changing Face

Soon after 2020, the foreign-born population in the U.S. is expected to reach 15 percent, surpassing the peak created by the immigration wave a century ago.

Percent foreign-born in the U.S.



Source: Pew Research Center THE NEW YORK TIMES

Further, because a vast wave of baby boomers will be swelling the ranks of the elderly, the so-called dependency ratio — the number of people below 18 and above 64 compared with the number of those in the prime working years — will rise to 72 per 100 by 2050 from about 59 per 100 in 2005, according to the projections, by the nonpartisan [Pew Research Center](#). The ratio will be even higher if [immigration](#) subsides, the report found.

What such an outcome could portend, other analysts have said, is a nation riven politically between older, whiter, voting retirees who are increasingly supported by a younger, darker, working population that, as immigrants, may be disproportionately ineligible to vote.

“A higher number of elderly or children relative to the number of workers translates into higher costs per worker to pay for all government programs, including those targeted at the young and old such as schools and Social Security,” said the new analysis, based on fertility and death rates and immigration trends.

The center projects that the foreign-born share of the work force will increase to 23 percent by 2050 from 15 percent in 2005; the Hispanic share will more than double, to 31 percent.

Sometime from 2020 to 2025, the center estimates, the foreign-born will account for 15 percent of the nation's people. Immigrants were about 12 percent of the population in 2005, an estimated 14.7 percent in 1910 and just under 15 percent in the late 19th century.

The analysis, by Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, projects that 19 percent of Americans will be foreign-born in 2050 (about the same share as in Australia and Canada today); that the share of Hispanic residents will have more than doubled, to 29 percent from 14 percent in 2005; and that the share of Asian-Americans will have almost doubled, to 9 percent from 5 percent.

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Immigration, the study says, will account for 82 percent of the increase in the nation's population, which will be an estimated 438 million in 2050. That 82 percent translates into 117 million people: 67 million new immigrants and 50 million of their children and grandchildren.

But because births to Hispanic and Asian immigrants will play a growing role in population increase, a smaller share of both groups will be foreign-born in 2050 than today, the analysis found. The native-born Hispanic population, already about 60 percent of all Hispanic residents, will rise to 67 percent by 2050.

The report projects a higher rate of immigration than do a number of federal agencies but concludes, as they do, that the share of black residents will be about the same as now in 2050, roughly 13 percent, and that the proportion of non-Hispanic whites will shrink below half, to 47 percent.

The authors did not delineate the impact of illegal immigrants, who now make up about 30 percent of the foreign-born. Nor did they try to quantify possible changes in immigration policies or how people will identify themselves ethnically and racially in coming decades.

They cautioned that their projections were subject to unforeseen events, but wrote that they "offer a starting point for understanding and analyzing the parameters of future demographic change."

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