

THE IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PROCESS

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▶ Immigrants enter the United States in three ways.

A foreign-born individual may enter the United States as a legal permanent resident (LPR), or Green Card holder; as a temporary visa holder (e.g., tourist, seasonal worker, H-1B, or student); or as an illegal (or unauthorized) immigrant. As of March 2009, the Pew Hispanic Center estimated 37% of the foreign-born were naturalized U.S. citizens, 31% were legal permanent immigrants, 4% were legal temporary visa holders, and the remaining 28% were illegal. California is home to an estimated 2.6 million illegal immigrants.

▶ Most immigrants granted LPR status are sponsored by family.

In 2009, 1.1 million immigrants were admitted to the United States as legal permanent residents: 47% were sponsored by immediate relatives who were U.S. citizens and 19% entered through family preferences (sponsored by immediate relatives of LPRs or non-immediate relatives of U.S. citizens). Another 16% of LPRs were admitted as refugees or granted asylum from political persecution. A relatively small number, 13%, were admitted through employment preferences. (There are periodic proposals to shift U.S. admission criteria toward an emphasis on skills, along the lines of the Canadian and Australian systems.) The remaining 4% were admitted through a diversity lottery (more than 9.1 million people applied for 50,000 slots).

▶ Successful LPR applicants may wait many years for their visas.

Although all applicants face waiting periods due to application processing delays, many who have applied to enter through family preferences or employment preferences have to wait years after applying to gain legal entry to the United States, due to annual limits on preference categories or admissions by country of origin. Family preference applicants from Mexico, the Philippines, China, and India are waiting between 1 and 18 years for LPR visas after their applications have been approved. In California, 50% of the 2009 LPRs were from these four countries.

▶ Most LPRs have prior experience as unauthorized immigrants in the U.S.

Estimates from 2003 data suggest that 33% of California LPRs are new arrivals in the United States, 15% have prior legal experience (as visitors or temporary visa holders), and 52% have at some time been in this country as unauthorized residents (either as illegal border crossers or visa overstayers).

▶ Only legal permanent residents are eligible to naturalize (become citizens).

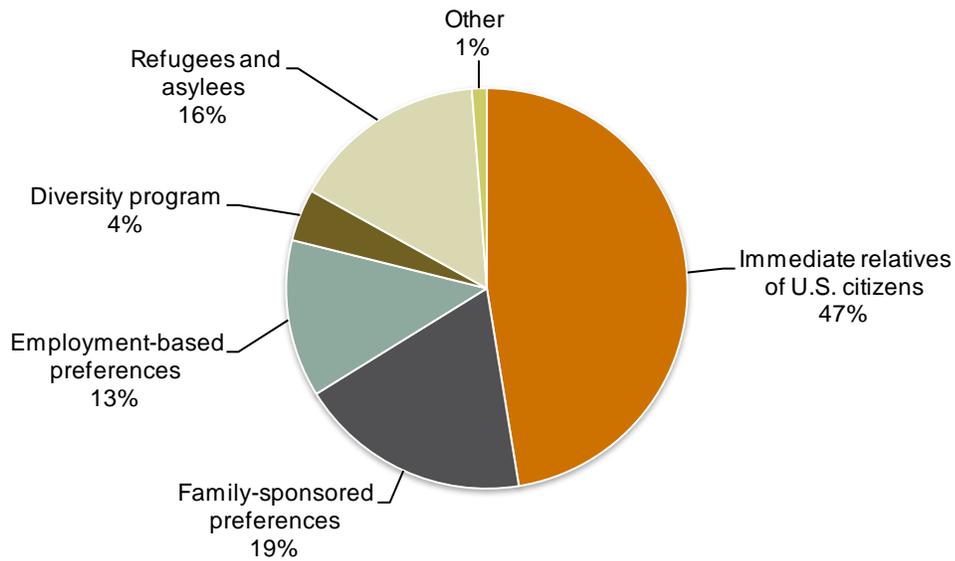
LPRs are eligible to naturalize five years after obtaining their LPR status (those married to a U.S. citizen need wait only three years). Processing times for naturalization applications are currently taking about 10 to 12 months. Estimates suggest that the percentage of recently naturalized LPRs is at its highest rate in decades: 52%, and that recently arrived LPRs are naturalizing more quickly than in the past. All children born in the United States are citizens.

▶ Californians agree that major changes in immigration policy are needed.

Most California adults (68%) surveyed in PPIC's March 2010 Statewide Survey say that major changes to immigration policy are needed (as opposed to minor changes or no changes).

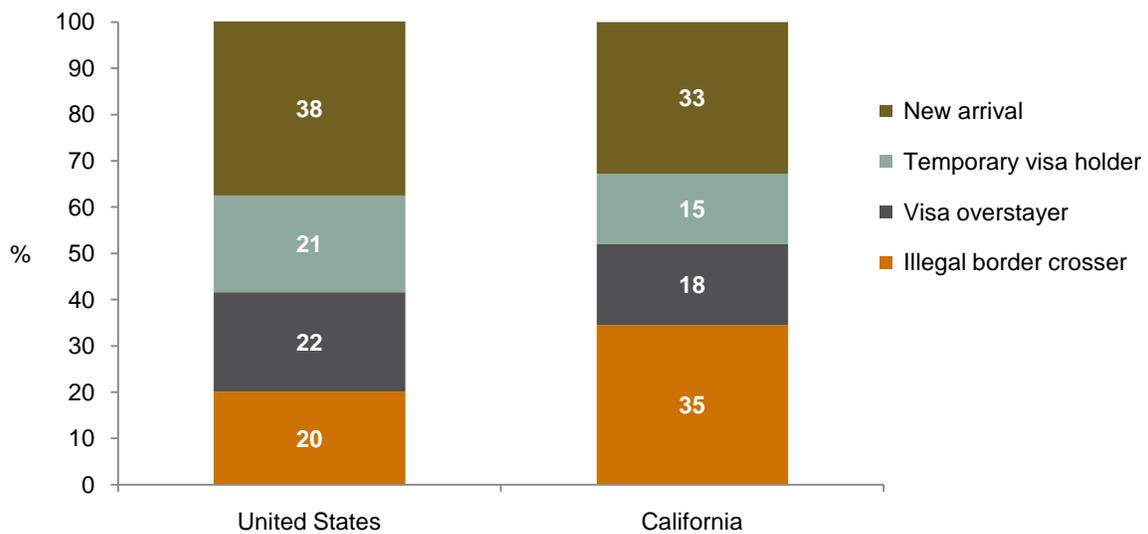


Pathways to legal permanent residency in the United States, 2009



Source: Randall Monger, "U.S. Legal Permanent Residents: 2009," Annual Flow Report, Office of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, April 2010.

Prior U.S. experience of immigrants gaining legal permanent residency, 2003



Source: Joseph Hayes and Laura Hill, "Immigrant Pathways to Legal Permanent Residence," PPIC, 2008.

Sources: Department of Homeland Security. U.S. Department of State. Pew Hispanic Center. Joseph Hayes and Laura Hill, "Immigrant Pathways to Legal Permanent Residence: Now and Under a Merit-Based System," PPIC, 2008. PPIC Statewide Survey, March 2010. Randall Monger, "U.S. Legal Permanent Residents: 2009," Annual Flow Report, Office of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, April 2010.

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