



1.45 Million Immigrants Arrived in 2017, Down from 1.75 Million in 2016

The number arriving declined for every major sending region

By Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler

Newly released public-use data from the Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) shows 1.45 million new legal and illegal immigrants settled in the United States in 2017, fewer than the 1.75 million in 2016 or the 1.62 million in 2015.¹ It should be pointed out that the 2018 ACS reflects the population on July 1, so it would not capture most of the surge in illegal immigrant families and unaccompanied minors released into the United States at the southwest border in all of 2018. The ACS was also collected before the even more dramatic increase in families and children arriving in 2019.² The falloff in arrivals in 2017 may be due to increased enforcement efforts, lower refugee admissions, and more robust vetting of applicants undertaken by the Trump administration.

On November 14, the Census Bureau made available the public-use data from the ACS, allowing researchers a more detailed look at the nation's demographics, including the individual year of arrival for immigrants. This information was not available from the more generalized ACS information released by the Bureau last month. Newly arrived immigrants in the ACS include new green card recipients as well as long-term "temporary" visitors (e.g. guestworkers and foreign students) and illegal immigrants.

Among the findings:

- Newly released data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) shows 1.45 million immigrants (legal and illegal) arrived in 2017. This may indicate an end to the post-2011 surge in new arrivals. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of new immigrants arriving annually increased steadily from 1.08 million immigrants to 1.75 million immigrants. (Figure 1)
- While lower than in 2016 and 2015, the 1.45 million immigrants who came in 2017 roughly matches the level in 2014 and was higher than any year between 2002 to 2013. (Figure 1)
- The decline in new arrivals was very broad, impacting every major sending region. As a result, the relative shares that each region accounted for held roughly constant between 2016 and 2017. (Figure 2, Table 1)
- As was the case in 2016, Latin America (37 percent) was the top sending region, accounting for a slightly larger share of new immigrants than East and South Asia (36 percent) combined. East and South Asia accounted for the largest share of new immigrants from 2010 to 2015.³ (Figure 2, Table 1)
- While the number of arrivals in 2017 from every region was lower than in two prior years, the number coming from just about every part of the world was still higher in 2017 than it was between 2002 and 2013. (Figure 2, Table 1)
- Data for the first six months of 2018 indicates that the number of new arrivals may be similar to 2017, however this number is only preliminary. (Figure 1)

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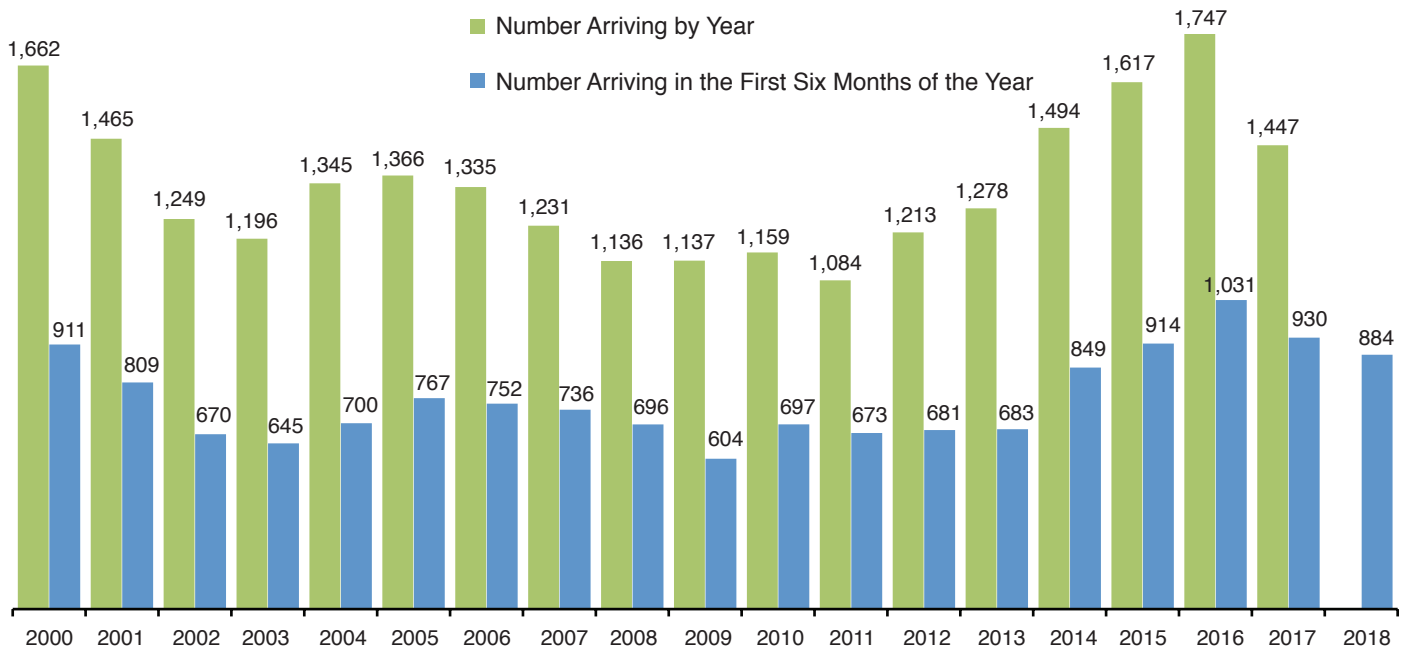
- In an analysis published last month, the Center for Immigration Studies reported that the Census Bureau's other large survey that measures immigrants, the Current Population Survey (CPS), showed a significantly larger total number of immigrants in 2018 (45.8 million) vs. the total shown in the ACS (44.7 million); it is not clear why the two surveys do not agree.⁴
- In addition to showing a larger total immigrant population in 2018 than the ACS, the CPS also shows significantly more growth between 2017 and 2018 than the ACS — 200,000 vs. 1.6 million. Unfortunately, the CPS does not report individual year of arrival, so it is not directly comparable to the ACS in this regard.⁵
- The much larger growth in the CPS from 2017 to 2018 could be an indication that the level of new immigration was higher than shown in the ACS. However, at this point there is no clear indication that this is the case.

Data Source. On November 14, the Census Bureau released the public-use data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS). The survey reflects the U.S. population as of July 1, 2018. The ACS is by far the largest survey taken by the federal government each year and includes over two million households. Last month, the Bureau posted some of the results from the ACS at data.census.gov. However, only by downloading the newly released public-use micro data from the ACS and analyzing it is it possible to determine an individual's year of arrival. The tables generated from data.census.gov do not allow this level of detail.

Immigrants, including recent arrivals, are typically referred to as the “foreign-born” by the Census Bureau. These are individuals who were not U.S. citizens at birth. It includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents (green card holders), temporary workers, and foreign students. It does not include those born to immigrants in the United States, including to illegal immigrant parents, or those born in outlying U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico. In addition, prior research by the Department of Homeland Security and others indicates that some 90 percent of illegal immigrants respond to the ACS.⁶ Thus all the figures reported above are for both legal and illegal immigrants.

Newly arrived immigrants captured in the Census Bureau's ACS include the foreign-born as described above. It does not include those who come to the United States for short stays such as tourists or business travelers. The ACS uses a two-month rule to determine who will be included in the survey. That is, the survey counts anyone residing for at least two months at an address. While there are very few newly arrived immigrants in institutions, the ACS does include that population as well, which includes prisons and nursing homes. Since the survey represents the population at mid-year, it is necessary to wait until next year's ACS is released to get a complete picture of the total number of immigrants for the year. So, for example, the total number of new arrivals in 2017 became available once the 2018 public-use data was available.

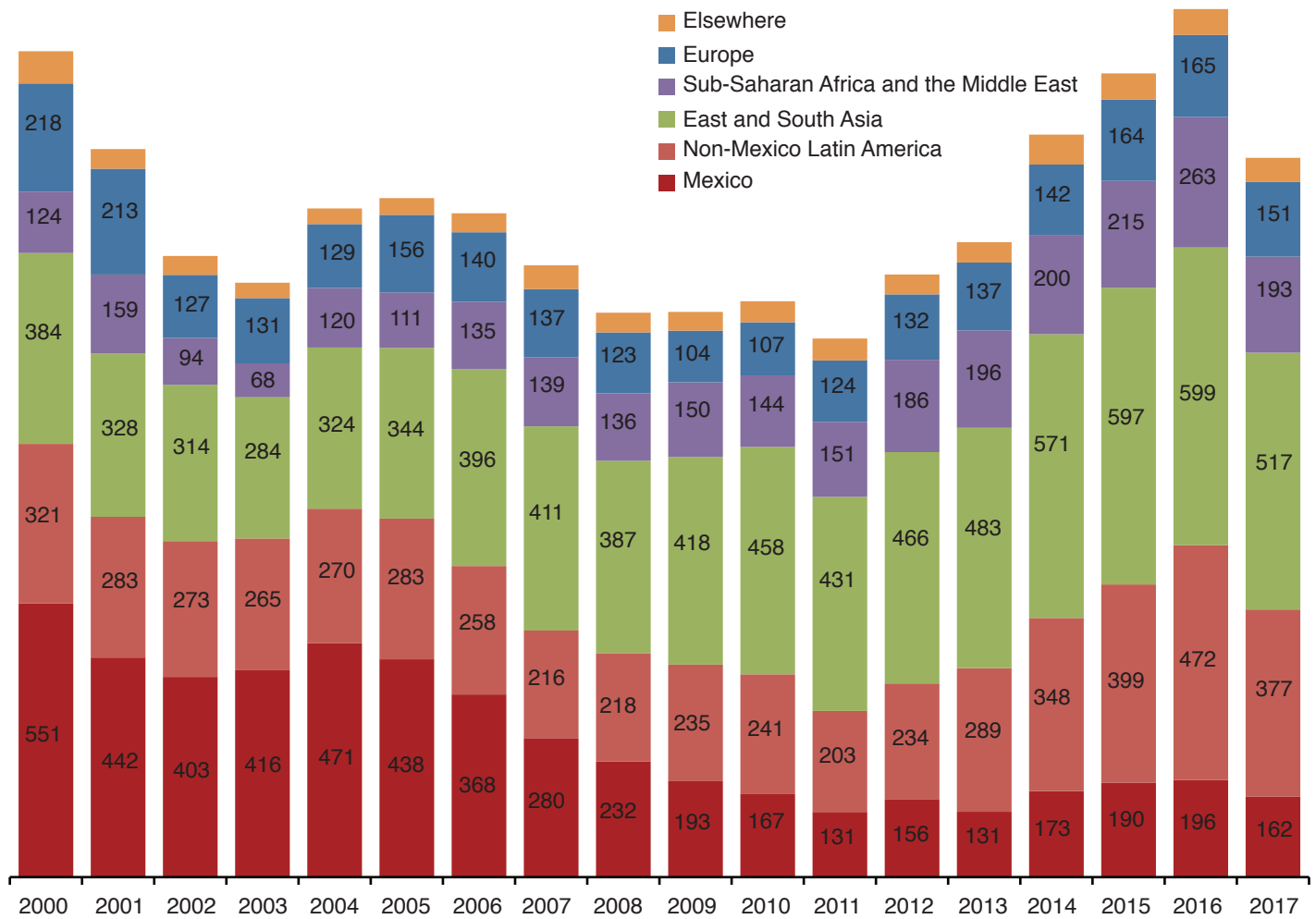
**Figure 1. Number of New Immigrants Arriving by Year
(2000 to 2018) in the American Community Survey (thousands)**



Source: 2001 to 2018 public-use files of the American Community Survey (ACS). Figures for 2000 come from the public-use file of the decennial census. Full calendar-year data is from the the survey taken in the following calendar year; half-year data is from the year the survey was taken.

Table 3 reports confidence intervals for annual arrival data.

Figure 2. Sending Regions, Immigrants Who Arrived Each Year, 2000-2017 (thsnds.)



Source: 2001 to 2018 public-use files of the American Community Survey (ACS).
Regions are defined in end note 3.

Table 1. Newly Arrived Immigrants by Sending Region, Country and Year, 2000 to 2018 (thousands)

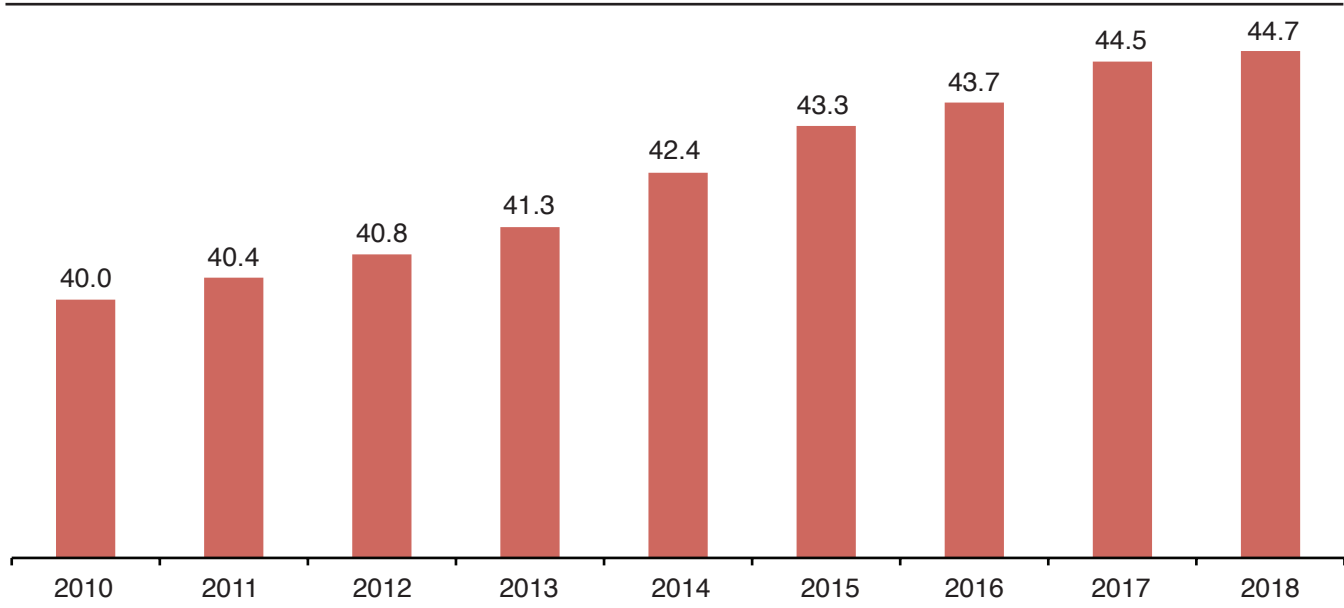
Region	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Mexico	551	442	403	416	471	438	368	280	232	193	167	131	156	131	173	190	196	162	115
Central America	78	55	68	68	99	115	90	71	60	56	59	46	62	90	122	106	133	109	70
El Salvador	34	19	18	22	24	32	30	20	22	19	20	17	21	36	40	40	53	37	14
Guatemala	19	17	24	29	43	46	32	30	20	19	19	14	19	22	32	28	33	37	28
Honduras	9	10	13	10	22	24	19	14	12	12	13	9	15	27	40	29	40	24	21
Caribbean	89	86	71	90	80	84	84	78	89	113	110	89	102	117	114	146	168	113	52
Cuba	31	23	17	23	28	21	31	21	30	31	34	29	37	42	39	55	64	23	10
Dominican Republic	10	19	10	27	21	21	19	17	25	34	30	25	29	34	37	43	50	39	22
South America	153	142	135	108	92	84	84	67	70	65	72	68	69	82	113	146	171	155	83
Venezuela	14	18	16	17	8	6	5	8	8	7	10	10	7	8	24	41	63	49	20
Europe	218	213	127	131	129	156	140	137	123	104	107	124	132	137	142	164	165	151	96
South Asia	149	97	90	70	91	103	113	130	131	114	143	158	174	189	239	240	244	203	108
India	120	74	63	58	70	86	90	111	103	86	111	117	127	142	194	189	194	167	88
East Asia	235	232	224	214	234	240	283	281	256	304	315	272	291	295	332	357	355	313	222
China	67	62	38	52	49	62	69	63	69	95	97	103	107	126	141	144	171	156	109
Philippines	38	45	41	37	50	46	64	65	48	54	59	42	46	43	51	56	52	49	36
Middle East	67	95	50	28	51	53	54	65	79	83	79	77	106	110	110	116	137	94	48
Sub-Saharan Africa	57	64	44	40	69	59	81	74	56	68	65	74	80	86	89	98	126	99	48
Canada	47	28	31	20	21	25	25	34	28	28	29	32	28	28	45	39	38	37	31
Elsewhere	18	12	7	11	11	9	13	14	11	9	13	12	12	13	15	14	14	11	10
Total	1,662	1,465	1,250	1,196	1,346	1,366	1,336	1,231	1,136	1,137	1,159	1,084	1,213	1,278	1,494	1,617	1,747	1,447	884
Latin America	872	725	676	681	741	721	626	496	451	428	408	335	390	421	522	589	668	539	320
Non-Mexico Latin America	321	283	273	265	270	283	258	216	218	235	241	203	234	289	348	399	472	377	205

Source: Source: 2001 to 2018 public-use files of the American Community Survey (ACS).

Regions are defined in end note 3. Full calendar year data is from the survey taken in the following calendar year, half year data is from the year the survey was taken.

* First six months of year.

Figure 3. The Immigrant Population (Legal and Illegal), 2010 to 2018 (millions)



Source: American Community Survey 2010 to 2018 generated at data.census.gov.
Table 4 reports confidence intervals.

Table 2. Immigrant Pop. in the U.S. by Country & Region 1990-2018

Region	1990	2000	2010	2018	Growth 2010-2018	% Growth 2010-2018
Mexico	4,298,014	9,177,487	11,711,103	11,171,893	(539,210)	-5%
East Asia	3,759,346	5,822,450	7,516,059	8,625,310	1,109,251	15%
China	921,070	1,518,652	2,166,526	2,845,341	678,815	31%
Korea	568,397	864,125	1,100,422	1,039,099	(61,323)	-6%
Vietnam	543,262	988,174	1,240,542	1,345,753	105,211	8%
Philippines	912,674	1,369,070	1,777,588	2,013,756	236,168	13%
Burma	19,835	33,905	82,200	140,391	58,191	71%
Thailand	106,919	169,801	222,759	269,381	46,622	21%
South Asia	579,993	1,341,323	2,346,637	3,493,642	1,147,005	49%
India	450,406	1,022,552	1,780,322	2,652,853	872,531	49%
Pakistan	91,889	223,477	299,581	379,103	79,522	27%
Bangladesh	21,414	95,294	153,691	261,052	107,361	70%
Nepal	2,262	11,859	69,458	148,634	79,176	114%
Caribbean	1,947,435	2,961,737	3,738,920	4,461,065	722,145	19%
Cuba	736,971	872,716	1,104,679	1,343,960	239,281	22%
Dominican Republic	347,858	687,677	879,187	1,177,864	298,677	34%
Jamaica	334,140	553,827	659,771	733,429	73,658	11%
Haiti	225,393	419,317	587,149	687,186	100,037	17%
Central America	1,133,978	2,026,150	3,052,509	3,581,747	529,238	17%
El Salvador	465,433	817,336	1,214,049	1,419,330	205,281	17%
Guatemala	225,739	480,665	830,824	1,006,987	176,163	21%
Honduras	108,923	282,852	522,581	646,253	123,672	24%
South America	1,037,497	1,930,271	2,729,831	3,303,082	573,251	21%
Colombia	286,124	509,872	636,555	789,561	153,006	24%
Peru	144,199	278,186	428,547	467,172	38,625	9%
Ecuador	143,314	298,626	443,173	443,105	(68)	0%
Brazil	82,489	212,428	339,613	472,637	133,024	39%
Venezuela	42,119	107,031	184,039	393,841	209,802	114%
Guyana	120,698	211,189	265,271	280,297	15,026	6%
Middle East	728,682	1,187,692	1,611,897	2,135,362	523,465	32%
Iran	210,941	283,226	356,756	381,951	25,195	7%
Iraq	44,916	89,892	159,800	237,422	77,622	49%
Egypt	66,313	113,396	137,799	207,579	69,780	51%
Israel	86,048	109,719	127,896	129,926	2,030	2%
Lebanon	86,369	105,910	121,000	121,926	926	1%
Saudi Arabia	12,632	21,881	45,016	74,674	29,658	66%
Syria	36,782	54,561	59,554	111,766	52,212	88%
Afghanistan	28,444	45,195	54,458	113,669	59,211	109%
Europe	4,360,463	4,980,837	4,906,698	4,834,413	(72,285)	-1%
United Kingdom	640,145	677,751	669,794	699,193	29,399	4%
Russia	n/a	340,177	383,166	383,305	139	0%
Italy	580,592	473,338	364,972	324,903	(40,069)	-11%
Ukraine	n/a	275,153	326,493	325,885	(608)	0%
Germany	711,929	706,704	604,616	559,102	(45,514)	-8%
Sub-Saharan Africa	264,775	690,809	1,326,634	2,019,125	692,491	52%
Nigeria	55,350	134,940	219,309	374,711	155,402	71%
Ethiopia	34,805	69,531	173,592	278,083	104,491	60%
Ghana	20,889	65,572	124,696	195,371	70,675	57%
Kenya	14,371	41,081	88,519	146,560	58,041	66%
Somalia	2,437	36,139	82,454	103,377	20,923	25%
Canada	744,830	820,771	798,649	813,664	15,015	2%
Oceania/Elsewhere	912,303	168,362	216,736	289,199	72,463	33%
Total	19,767,316	31,107,889	39,955,673	44,728,502	4,772,829	12%
Predominantly Muslim Countries	840,595	1,518,755	2,184,664	2,925,603	740,939	34%
Latin America	8,416,924	16,095,645	21,232,363	22,517,787	1,285,424	6%
Non-Mexico Latin America	4,118,910	6,918,158	9,521,260	11,345,894	1,824,634	19%

Source: Data for 1990 and 2000 is from the decennial census. Data for 2010 is from the American Community Survey from American FactFinder at census.gov. Data for 2018 is from the ACS generated at data.census.gov. Figures for 1990 are from Table 3 [here](#). Data for 2000 for Burma, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, and Somalia are from the 2000 Decennial Census (5% sample) public-use data.

Regions are defined in end note 3.

**Table 3. Immigrant Arrivals,
2000 to 2018 (thousands)**

Year	Arrivals Full Year	90% Confidence Interval	Arrivals First 6 Mos.	90% Confidence Interval
2000	1,662	±71	911	±45
2001	1,465	±67	809	±50
2002	1,249	±62	670	±46
2003	1,196	±61	645	±45
2004	1,345	±41	700	±47
2005	1,366	±41	767	±31
2006	1,335	±41	752	±31
2007	1,231	±39	736	±31
2008	1,136	±34	696	±30
2009	1,137	±34	604	±25
2010	1,159	±35	697	±27
2011	1,084	±32	673	±27
2012	1,213	±34	681	±25
2013	1,278	±35	683	±25
2014	1,494	±37	849	±28
2015	1,617	±39	914	±29
2016	1,747	±40	1,031	±31
2017	1,447	±37	930	±30
2018*	n/a	n/a	884	±29

Source: 2001 to 2018 public-use files of the American Community Survey (ACS) and 2000 Decennial Census.

*First six months of year only.

Full calendar year data is from the survey taken in the following calendar year, half year data is from the year the survey was taken.

**Table 4. Total Immigrant
Population, 2000 to 2018**

Year	Total Immigrant Population	90% Confidence Interval
2000	31,107,889	n/a
2001	31,482,280	n/a
2002	33,048,849	±172,094
2003	33,533,945	±132,522
2004	34,279,756	±149,140
2005	35,689,842	±131,480
2006	37,547,789	±125,642
2007	38,059,694	±119,489
2008	37,960,935	±122,968
2009	39,313,000	±118,061
2010	39,955,854	±115,157
2011	40,377,860	±125,123
2012	40,824,658	±111,594
2013	41,348,066	±129,154
2014	42,391,794	±130,122
2015	43,290,372	±122,466
2016	43,739,345	±129,849
2017	44,525,855	±135,763
2018	44,728,721	±157,222

Source: 2001 to 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) and 2000 Decennial Census.

End Notes

¹ The ACS reflects the population of the United States on July 1 of each year. Immigrants are asked when they came to the United States in the survey. To obtain a full calendar year of arrival data, it is necessary to use the following year's survey. So the 2018 ACS provides information on the number of immigrants who arrived in all of 2017, but only the first six months of 2018. The 2019 ACS will provide the total number of arrivals in 2018.

² The total number of [apprehensions and inadmissible](#) persons on the Southwest border increased from 416,000 in FY 2017, to 521,000 in FY 2018, and to 978,000 in FY 2019. The total number of unaccompanied minors and individuals in family units, subgroups of all those apprehended or turned away at the border, was [117,000 in 2017](#), [157,000 in 2018](#), and [550,000 in 2019](#). Some minors and individuals in family units were turned away and others were subject to the "Remain in Mexico" policy. However, the overwhelming majority of these individuals were released into the United States in all three years.

³ The regions in this report are defined in the following manner: Countries that can be identified in the public-use 2018 ACS file are coded as the following regions: **Mexico:** Mexico; **Central America:** Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama; **South America:** Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, and South America not specified; **Caribbean:** Bermuda, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Antigua-Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, and Caribbean and West Indies and Americas not specified; **South Asia:** India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Nepal; **East Asia:** China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Mongolia, Asia not specified; **Europe:** Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, England, Scotland, United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Albania, Greece, Macedonia, Italy, Portugal, Azores, Spain, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Belarus, Montenegro, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Byelorussia, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, USSR not specified, and Europe not specified; **Middle East:** Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Sudan, and North Africa not specified; **Sub-Saharan Africa:** Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Cameroon, South Africa, Zaire, Congo, Zambia, Togo, Gambia, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, South Sudan, and Africa and Western and Eastern Africa not specified; **Canada;** **Oceania/Elsewhere:** Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Elsewhere. The above list is for 2010 to 2018; in prior years several smaller sending countries cannot be identified individually in the ACS.

⁴ In [this analysis](#) we discuss at length the differences in the two surveys and how until 2018 the CPS showed fewer immigrants than the ACS.

⁵ The CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement, which reflects the population in March of each year, only reports year of arrival grouped into multiple-year cohorts. The size of each arrival cohort in the public-use CPS data is 2.25 years in the odd numbered years and 3.25 years in the even numbered years. While the CPS is a very large survey, it is still much smaller than the ACS. In particular, the number of newly arrived immigrants in the CPS is modest, making it much less statically robust than the ACS. This fact coupled with the grouping of year of arrival data in different size groups every other year makes it very difficult to discern changes from year to year in the number of new immigrants in the CPS.

⁶ The Department of Homeland Security uses the ACS as the basis for its estimates of illegal immigrants. See A1-1 of their most recent estimate of the unauthorized immigrant population: Bryan Baker, ["Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2015"](#), Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, December 2018.