

**NEW ALTERNATIVES IN ESTIMATING MIGRATION
TO THE UNITED STATES: YEAR OF ENTRY- AND
RESIDENCE ONE YEAR AGO-BASED ESTIMATES, 2000-2004**

by
Alexa K. Kennedy-Puthoff
Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau

Renuka Bhaskar
Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Each year, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates the net number of migrants to the United States for inclusion in the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program. This net international migration (NIM) component of the population estimates is comprised of several parts: the estimated net number of foreign-born migrants to the United States, the net number of movers between Puerto Rico and the mainland United States, and an estimate of native emigrants (the movement of U.S. military personnel across U.S. borders is calculated and included in the population estimates separately from the net international migration component). The net number of foreign-born migrants to the United States is by far the largest part, accounting for over 90 percent of the net international migration component. This paper focuses on the construction of the net foreign-born estimate, and describes efforts currently underway to improve the annual estimates of foreign-born migrants to the United States.

The data utilized in this paper are from the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is a nationwide survey that provides up-to-date estimates of demographic, housing, social, and economic characteristics of the population in the United States, and is the planned replacement for the census long form. This paper includes estimates derived from five years of ACS data, 2000 through 2004.

The U.S. Census Bureau currently estimates the annual number of foreign-born migrants to the United States using a methodology based on the annual change in the size of the foreign-born population as measured by the American Community Survey. This "Single

Year Change” method is an adaptation of the residual method utilized in the 1990s.

To estimate the number of new foreign-born migrants to the United States, we take the difference between the foreign-born population in time one and the foreign-born population in time two, and adjust that number to account for deaths to the foreign born during the period. While the current method benefits from utilizing annually updated data from the ACS, the estimates of the size of the foreign-born population—on which this method relies—are sensitive to changes in the survey population controls.

In an effort to improve our estimates of net international migration (of which the net foreign-born component is the major part), we have explored several alternative methodologies. Two of the most promising alternatives are discussed in this paper: one utilizes data on the year of U.S. entry of foreign-born respondents, and the other utilizes data on the residence of the foreign born in the year prior to the survey.

“Year of Entry”-based estimates use information from the ACS question “When did this person come to live in the United States?” This methodology includes in the net foreign born migration estimate those who are foreign born and whose year of entry is the year prior to the survey. “Residence One Year Ago”-based estimates use information on place of previous residence to estimate net foreign-born migration to the United States. This universe is based on the question “Where did this person live one year ago?” Estimates based on this methodology include the foreign-born population whose residence one year ago was abroad in the net foreign-born migration figure.

The “Year of Entry” and “Residence One Year Ago”-based estimates show similar trends across the 2000 to 2004 time period, albeit at different levels. Both alternatives show no change in the level of foreign-born migration to the U.S. between 2000 and 2001, and declining levels of immigration between 2001 and 2003. The trends for the 2003 to 2004 estimates diverge, with the residence one year ago-based estimates showing a slight increase, and the year of entry-based estimates showing a slight decrease in foreign-born immigration.

The proportions of the foreign born included in each of these universes are also similar for the 2000 to 2004 time period. The foreign born population whose year of entry was the year prior to the survey includes between 3.4 percent and 4.6 percent of the total foreign-born population for each of these years. The proportion of the foreign-born population whose residence one year ago was abroad is slightly lower, consisting of between 2.9 percent and 4.2 percent of the total foreign-born population living in the United States. While the proportions of the total foreign-born population included in each of these universes are similar, the populations included in each universe do not fully overlap. This paper documents those differences, and discusses possible reasons for the apparent inconsistencies.

Additionally, we evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each of the alternative methodologies for estimating migration to the United States. We discuss the allocation and imputation rates of the variables used in each method to estimate the number of

foreign-born migrants, and address the question of how reasonable the resultant foreign-born migration numbers look when compared to other data sources. Finally, we provide an overview of the ways in which the resultant estimates of foreign-born migration could be included in the broader net international migration estimate.