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image



A naturalization ceremony in Jersey City, N.J., in September MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO/ GETTY IMAGES

## Immigration Is Main Driver Of Population Growth in U.S.

By Jon Kamp, Paul Overberg, and Max Rust

Immigrants are having a huge impact on the nation's population growth, new federal estimates show.

Newcomers accounted for 84% of U.S. growth in the year ended June 30, the Census Bureau said Thursday, continuing a trend since the Covid-19 pandemic. This was fueled by a surge in legal and illegal arrivals, a falling birthrate and a death rate propped up by an aging population.

The Census Bureau estimates include major revisions to earlier estimates that are intended to better capture a surge in immigration. The bureau estimates about 2.7 million net arrivals for the most recent year. The bureau also more than doubled its net immigration estimate for the prior year to about 2.3 million. The agency now estimates the U.S. grew by 8.5 million over the past four years, with immigrants accounting for the vast majority.

For the most recent year, through June 30, the bureau estimates that the U.S. population grew by about 1% to 340.1 million. This is the fastest growth since 2001, the bureau said. \*

Much of this growth came in states such as Texas (563,000) and Florida (467,000). Only three states were estimated to have lost population, and just barely: Vermont, West Virginia and Mississippi. The South accounted for 54% of the latest year's growth. \*

The bureau's numbers are the latest data point for fed-

eral agencies, economists and demographers who are trying to measure how newcomers are boosting the population and adding to the nation's workforce.

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Immigrants became a major source of U.S. growth because of recently high numbers of people coming to the U.S., a historically low birthrate and a death rate that, while down from pandemic peaks, remains elevated in part because of the graying population. In two decades before the pandemic, immigrants consistently accounted for less than half of U.S. population growth. \*

President-elect Donald Trump's proposals to limit immigration and boost deportations could affect the nation's ability to grow, given its heavy reliance on immigrants. A Brookings Institution study found that under an aggressive enforcement regime, the U.S. could see a net exodus of 650,000 immigrants in the first year of Trump's second term.

A significant loss of immigrant labor could put upward pressure on wages and prices as the Federal Reserve is still trying to lower inflation, which remains above the central bank's target. \*

The Census's new estimates mean "the immigration numbers now move from being a puzzle about the present to lots of uncertainty about the future," said economist Jed Kolko, who recently served as the Commerce Department's undersecretary for economic affairs in the Biden administration. His job included overseeing the Census Bureau.

The new estimates also show continued migration among the states into parts of the Sunbelt, and away from regions such as the Northeast.

This movement continues to slow from pandemic peaks. Still, the Northeast, Midwest and West all saw more people moving out than in, again, while the South posted big gains.

Many states would have lost population if not for immigration. California, for example, lost about 240,000 people to other states. But it netted about 361,000 immigrants, census estimates show. New Jersey lost a net 36,000 residents to other states but added 131,000 from abroad. Overall, about two-thirds of immigrants who arrived in the last year were concentrated in 10 states. \*

More immigrants in Texas and Florida added to the continued flow of people into those states, though they both saw smaller numbers of domestic movers than in recent years.

Seventeen states saw more deaths than births in the recent year. The biggest impact was in West Virginia and three New England states with particularly old populations: Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire. \*

Illegal immigration has slowed significantly after peaking last winter because of a mix of efforts in Mexico and the U.S. These efforts include an order issued by President Biden in June that disqualifies migrants from winning asylum if they enter the country illegally.

Census estimates have struggled to keep pace with the recent immigration surge while relying largely on the bureau's survey of roughly two million households from the prior year. The fresh estimates add newly available government data on refugees to better capture the immigration impact.

The Congressional Budget Office drew attention in January when it estimated that net immigration—the difference between incoming and departing people—reached 3.3 million last year. The new Census Bureau estimate at least partially closed that gap.

Accurate census numbers help federal and state officials allocate billions of dollars in funding.

These numbers are also important as federal authorities and economists measure housing demand, wages and mortality rates. The Federal Reserve relies on estimates of the labor force and job growth as it tries to cool inflation and time interest rate cuts.

"Knowing how much immigration there is is critical for lots of policy questions," said Kolko, the economist.