

**Most immigrants in Georgia are here illegally; Analysis of census data:  
Group's study also sees strain on services nationwide due to influx, but  
some dispute that.**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

November 30, 2007 Friday, Main Edition

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
ajc.com

**Section:** METRO NEWS; Pg. 1E

**Length:** 643 words

**Byline:** BOB DART

Cox Washington Bureau

## Body

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Washington --- **Most** of the 953,000 **immigrants** living in **Georgia** are in the country **illegally**, according to an **analysis** for the Center for Immigration **Studies** released Thursday.

Basing its findings on **Census** Bureau **data**, the **analysis** said **Georgia** has one of the fastest-growing **immigrant** populations of any state. It calculated **that** 53 percent of the state's foreign-born population --- 504,000 people --- are illegal **immigrants**. Only the estimates for Arizona, at 65 percent, and North Carolina, at 58 percent, were higher.

Overall, one in eight people living in the United States is an **immigrant**, the **analysis** found, for a total of 37.9 million people --- the highest level since the 1920s. The nation's **immigrant** population --- legal and illegal --- reached a record of 37.9 million in 2007, it said.

The **analysis** was conducted by Steven A. Camarota, director of research at the center, which advocates reduced immigration.

Camarota has been active in the national immigration debate. Independent demographers **disputed** some of the survey's conclusions, but not Camarota's methods of **data analysis**.

"The **immigrant** population in **Georgia** is there because of the state's severe labor needs, including the poultry, agricultural and carpet industries," said Lisa Navarette, a spokesman for the National Council of La Raza, an advocacy group for Hispanic-Americans.

The **analysis** said half of the **immigrants** from Mexico and Central America are in the country **illegally** and one-third of **those** from South America are illegal **immigrants**. It also documented the surge of new arrivals and described its impact.

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"The last seven years have been the highest period of immigration in American history," it concluded. "Immigrants and their young children [under 18] now account for one-fifth of the school-age population, one-fourth of those in poverty and nearly one-third of those without health insurance."

Camarota was criticized by some immigration scholars for failing to examine the progress immigrant families make the longer they remain and work in the United States.

"This is a one-eyed portrait," said Dowell Myers, a demographer at the University of Southern California who has studied immigrants' use of public services. "It is a profile of immigrants' dependency without any profile of their contributions."

Myers said his research shows that within a decade, new immigrants in California moved up quickly to steadier jobs with more benefits, and the rates of uninsured immigrants dropped sharply.

And Wayne Cornelius, a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego, who has studied Mexican immigration for decades, called Camarota's conclusions about immigrants' use of public services "misleading."

The census data, Cornelius said, does not allow concise estimates of use of public services by illegal immigrants.

Cornelius said his field research in San Diego County had shown that illegal immigrants underused the health care system, given their health needs.

The New York Times contributed to this article.

The Center for Immigration Studies' analysis found that in Georgia:

\* 7 percent of the state's total school-age population were illegal immigrants or the offspring of illegal immigrants.

\* 32.9 percent of immigrant households use at least one welfare program compared to 19.1 percent of native-born households.

\* Immigrants and their U.S.-born children under the age of 18 make up 13.3 percent of the state's total population.

\* The number of immigrants in the state has more than tripled in a little more than a decade --- growing from 268,000 in 1995 to 378,000 in 2000 to 953,000 in 2007. Since 2000, the state's immigration population has increased 58.2 percent.

\* 39.7 percent of the state's immigrants and their kids lived in or near poverty, compared to 28.9 percent of the native population and its children.

--- Staff writer Bob Dart

## Classification

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Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspapers

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (93%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); POPULATION GROWTH (89%); DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS (89%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (89%); RESEARCH INSTITUTES (78%); RESEARCH REPORTS (78%); POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS (78%); HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCE (77%); POLITICAL

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SCIENCE (72%); HISTORY (72%); ENTOMOLOGY (72%); CHILDREN (67%); FAMILY (67%); POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS (61%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (60%)

**Organization:** US **CENSUS** BUREAU (84%); NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA (54%)

**Industry:** POULTRY (65%); UNDERINSURED & UNINSURED PATIENTS (61%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (60%)

**Geographic:** SAN DIEGO, CA, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (93%); NORTH CAROLINA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%); SOUTH AMERICA (79%); CENTRAL AMERICA (74%)

**Load-Date:** November 30, 2007

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