

N.J. ranks third in increase of nonnatives; It trails only California and Texas, a new study says. N.J. immigrants tend to be more affluent, though.

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Body

New Jersey trails only California and ***Texas*** in the recent explosive growth of its ***immigrant*** population, according to a ***study*** to be released today.

But the state's ***nonnatives*** appear to be ***more affluent*** than ***immigrants*** elsewhere in the country, the ***study*** notes. And the Garden State's ***immigrants*** arrive legally in greater numbers - and receive government services somewhat less often.

The number of ***immigrants*** in ***New Jersey***, both legal and illegal, has jumped by almost 600,000 since 2000, according to the report from the Center for Immigration ***Studies*** in Washington.

It was the ***third***-largest numerical ***increase*** among the states.

As a result, ***immigrants*** and their U.S.-born children currently make up slightly ***more*** than a quarter of all ***New Jerseyans***, among the highest percentages in the nation.

Immigrants and their native-born offspring constitute almost 17 percent of the U.S. population.

In Pennsylvania, their share is 6 percent.

In the Garden State, 77 percent of all ***nonnative*** residents are present legally, compared with 70 percent nationwide. In Arizona, ***only*** 35 percent of the ***immigrant*** population is composed of legal residents.

Steven A. Camarota, research director at the Center of Immigration ***Studies*** and author of the ***new study, said*** yesterday the think tank supported reduced immigration and stricter enforcement of immigration laws, but no cutoff in social services to legal ***immigrants***.

The center recently served in an advisory capacity to Hazleton, Pa., in a legal challenge to that city's effort to enforce penalties for housing or employing illegal ***immigrants***.

In his 44-page report, Camarota statistically details the wave of immigration that has led to a near-doubling of the country's foreign-born population since 1990.

Nationwide, legal and illegal ***immigrants*** now make up 13 percent of the population. That is just under the historic peak of 1910, when 14.7 percent of the country was foreign-born.

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Today, one in eight U.S. residents is an immigrant. In 1990, it was one in 13, the reports notes.

The report draws upon the annual survey of the U.S. census, as well as estimates of the illegal population developed by the Department of Homeland Security, the Pew Hispanic Center, and others.

About 37 million current American residents are immigrants, and almost one in three is here illegally, the study concluded.

"The most important things are the numbers are big, they are growing very fast, and the number of illegal residents is big," Camarota said.

Since 2000, the report found, the total number of immigrants in New Jersey has gone up 46 percent, to 1.9 million.

During that time, the immigrant population of Pennsylvania increased to 581,000. That was a 60 percent hike, but it still left the state with a much smaller foreign-born mix than New Jersey, both in count and as a share of total population.

The study also broke down the immigrant population by such factors as income, use of welfare services, and coverage by health insurance.

In New Jersey, the median household income among immigrants was closer to that of native residents than in the nation as a whole.

In the affluent Garden State, the income figure was \$66,170 for immigrants versus \$68,988 for the native-born. Nationally, the native-born population had a median income of about \$49,000 - \$5,000 more than that of immigrants. Low incomes among immigrants are most common in states with larger populations of Mexicans, 60 percent of whom live in or near poverty nationwide.

About 20 percent of the state's immigrant households receive some form of welfare, compared with 14 percent of native households. Nationally, a third of all households of the foreign-born received such help, versus 19 percent of native-born households.

In New Jersey and elsewhere in the nation, there is a large gap between immigrants and natives when it comes to private health insurance.

About 37 percent of immigrants in the state had no private coverage, twice the rate of native-born New Jerseyans.

As for educational costs, the report found that illegal immigrants make up an unusually high percentage of the state's school-age population. Of children 5 to 17 years old, 6 percent were illegal residents - twice the national rate and the highest percent in the nation.

Despite these expenses, Charles "Shai" Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, which favors helping undocumented immigrants become citizens, said immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in services.

"One of the big lies in the immigration debate is based on a failure to understand that every immigrant pays 100 percent of the sales taxes and 100 percent of the property taxes," he said yesterday. In addition, because undocumented workers often present fraudulent Social Security numbers, they "pay more into payroll taxes than they receive because they're not going to get Social Security."

Tim Smith, a senior economist and immigration expert at the Rand Corp., a California research center, led a study in 1997 that focused on the costs of immigrant populations in California and New Jersey.

In an interview yesterday, Smith said that native Californians faced an additional tax "hit" of several thousand dollars to cover the schooling and other government costs of immigrants.

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But because New Jersey's immigrant population is more affluent, he said, Garden State natives likely faced a much smaller additional tax burden of perhaps a few hundred dollars.

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