

## ***FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION KEEPS RISING: IMMIGRATION TRUMPS CRITICAL NEED FOR U.S. POPULATION REDUCTION***

### **An NPG Forum Paper by David Simcox**

#### **Executive Summary**

Census projections proclaim that, with Americans' fertility falling and deaths soon to begin rising, immigration – not natural increase – will become the principal driver of U.S. population growth by the early 2030s.

That transition in our population dynamics may come even sooner, barring serious reductions in U.S. immigration intake. A September 2014 Census release shows that, despite some slowing growth attributed to the 2008 recession and aftermath, the nation's foreign-born population reached 41.3 million in 2013. This represents a net increase of 10.2 million since 2000 after subtracting emigration and deaths of the foreign-born.<sup>1</sup>

The 41.3 million figure would include legal and illegal immigrants, and nearly 2.0 million foreign-born sojourners living in the country under the increasing number of long-term temporary visa, parole and deferred deportation arrangements – such as students, temporary workers of all skill levels, investors, treaty traders, journalists, international civil servants, and special protected classes of aliens.

Curiously, the U.N. Population Division calculates the U.S. migrant population in 2013 at 45.8 million – which is 11 percent higher than Census' count. The U.N. estimates show both the U.S. foreign-born and total populations about 4.5 million larger in 2013 than does the customarily more conservative Census Bureau.<sup>2</sup> The variance raises a troubling question: does the U.N. accept higher estimates of the illegal alien population, shared by many Americans but rejected by the Census Bureau?

#### ***Foreign-Born Growth Now Three Times National Rate***

Census' figures imply a robust annual growth of America's foreign-born of 2.4 percent per year since 2000 – three times the growth rate of the population as a whole. Continuation of this growth rate would yield another doubling of the foreign-born to over 80 million by 2042. More remarkable is that such a large intake since 2000 occurred despite the widespread perception that illegal immigration – customarily almost a third of the overall annual intake – fell sharply with the onset of the recession in 2008, and that the Mexican-born population (the largest foreign-born segment at 11.6 million) fell by one percent during that period.

These numbers show growth of the foreign-born between 2007 and 2010 at 15-20 percent below its

pre-recession level, but still robust. For the 2010-2013 period, arrivals of immigrants remained high – some 3.3 million. But deaths and continued high emigration reduced net immigration to about 500,000 per year, a net figure somewhat below the average net since 2010.

For NPG, this growth of the foreign-born population in the past three years – while temporarily slower – delays the vitally-needed attainment of population stability, then reduction of U.S. population to a level sustainable over the long term. America, in terms of its massive consumption of resources and destruction of natural capital, is the world's most overpopulated nation. Any population growth at all sharpens this national predicament.

In the 24 years since 1990, the foreign-born population has doubled – representing a third-world-

style annual growth rate of slightly more than 3.0 percent. The percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born rose during the same period, surging from 8.0 percent to its present 13.1 percent. That foreign-born percentage is the highest since 1920 – but 1920 marked the beginning of a period of immigration restraint that would take the foreign-born share to a low of just 4.7 percent by 1970. Worth noting is that as immigrants' share of total population fell steadily between 1940 and 1980, the nation boasted a period of prosperity, rising productivity, and more equitable income distribution.

Now at 13.1 percent foreign-born, the U.S. is close to matching its all-time-high of foreign-born share: 14.8 percent in 1890. But the 41.3 million foreign-born recorded in 2013 is easily the numerically largest in U.S. history. America's role as the major world population sink is apparent in these numbers: a nation with only 4.5 percent of the world's population now accommodates 18.0 percent of all its immigrants.

### ***American-born Children of Immigrants Boost Growth***

These numbers only tell part of the story of immigration's impact on U.S. population growth. According to Census, in 2012 the second generation American-born children of immigrants numbered 36 million – a population that is increasing much faster than the U.S. population as a whole, owing to higher birth rates among the foreign-born. The current foreign stock of 78 million is projected to continue growing rapidly. The birth rate for immigrant women, though now gradually falling, is still nearly 50 percent higher than that of native-born women due to their younger average age and lower education.<sup>3</sup>

Pew Social Trends projects that by 2050, 37 percent of the U.S. population – 148 million under Census' current medium projections – will be immigrants or children of immigrants. Under Census' high projections, which assume net immigration almost doubling its current level, by 2050 immigrants and children of immigrants would reach 153 million.

### ***Zero Net Immigration a Receding Goal***

NPG has long called for the reduction of overall immigration to about 200,000 a year – a number that, when balanced against emigration and deaths among

the foreign-born, would yield *zero net migration*. Census made its last projection of U.S. population using the zero net migration variant in 2008. At that time, assuming zero net migration in effect since 2000, Census found then that the nation's population would reach: 303 million in 2015; 318.3 million in 2030; and 322.9 million in 2050. Under this assumption of zero net migration and then-prevailing fertility and mortality, the U.S. would have attained zero population growth in 2046 and entered negative population growth in 2048.

Census' latest projections (2012), based on falling immigration numbers in the mid- and late-2000s, reduced its expectation of net migration. In 2009 it had projected high net migration, rising from 1.3 million a year in 2010 to 2.0 million a year by 2050, with U.S. population then reaching 439 million. But in 2012, the Bureau reduced its projections considerably: net immigration of 0.8 million in 2015, rising to 1.2 million by 2050, with total population reaching 400 million by mid-century.

### ***Outlook: Will Already High Immigration Go Higher?***

Present and prospective conditions in the world and within the U.S. suggest that net immigration to America between now and 2060 will be closer to the 1.3 to 2.0 million range projected in 2009, further eclipsing any hope of early population stabilization. The pause in immigration growth since 2008 already shows signs of ending, with apprehensions of illegal immigrants up 45 percent since 2011.<sup>4</sup>

Can and will the U.S. slow immigration? Right now, the prospects are not encouraging. The worldwide demand for settlement in the U.S. is astronomical, and America's prevailing attitude is acquiescence.

### ***A Burgeoning, Urbanizing World on the Move – Toward the U.S.***

World population trends are likely to nurture continued growth in the overseas millions seeking to settle in the U.S. The latest U.N. projections have abandoned earlier projections of stabilization of world population by century's end.<sup>5</sup> With high fertility persisting in Africa and South Asia, according to a 2014 study in *Science* magazine there is an 80 percent chance that world population will increase to between

9.6 billion and 12.3 billion between now and 2100.<sup>6</sup>

Much of this growth will come in countries that are already major exporters of migrants to America: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam, the Central American republics, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. While Mexico – the source of 28.0 percent of all U.S. foreign-born – is experiencing slowly-falling fertility and solid economic growth, its large population (151 million by 2050) and myriad family links to the U.S. ensure it will remain a major sender.

All those nations, through earlier refugee and immigration programs, have established large diasporas in the U.S. with effective networks and migration channels back to their homelands. A disconcerting trend is that rapid economic development in a number of formerly poor countries often does not dampen the desire of many to immigrate to America. It may even stimulate flows by giving even more people the mobility and means to resettle here. The demand for immigration to the U.S. has grown, not fallen, with the emergence of countries such as China, South Korea, and Australia as economic powerhouses.

Along with vast population growth, America's migrant-sending nations are also experiencing rapid urbanization, a process which raises awareness of millions more of the migration option and the aid and resources they need to make it happen. Nigeria, with the migration advantages of an English-speaking state, is already Africa's leading immigration sender. Urbanizing rapidly, its population is expected to grow from its present 174 million to over 440 million by 2100, overtaking the U.S. as the world's third-largest nation. With its fertility falling more slowly than previously projected, Sub-Saharan Africa (including Nigeria) will top all regions in growth, adding 1.3 billion people by 2050 and portending a vast pool of candidates for migration to the U.S.

In a 2009 public opinion poll of 260,000 adults in 135 nations, Gallup found that about 16 percent of the world's adults – at that time some 700 million – would like to move permanently to another country. The U.S. was the easy first choice, being the preferred destination of 24 percent of respondents – about 165 million people.<sup>7</sup> The pull of jobs and family reunification in America, and the need for refuge from climate change and proliferating failing states, will further stimulate the rush of migrants to North America and Europe.

### ***For American Elites, No Such Thing as Too Much Population Growth***

In ruling political sectors of the U.S. there is indifference to these population trends – or, all too often, a view of them as beneficial for the planet and for America. These are the sectors which fear that somehow the U.S. is running out of people, and that it can immigrate and populate itself into a secure and prosperous future. “Population growth means economic growth” has long been an axiom among America's business interests, financiers, growth theory economists, and their political voices.

This conviction underlies the Senate's 2013 immigration reform bill *S. 744*, which would have doubled legal immigration if not rejected by the House. But that growth ideology, energized by the fear of an aging population, retains strong backing within both political parties. It can be counted on to produce major immigration expansion proposals again in the future, regardless of the partisan balance of power.

Then there are major U.S. political constellations that regard immigration policy as a sort of global social work. They will remain a powerful force for expanding humanitarian immigration while ever-widening and loosening the definition of “humanitarian need.” Leading them are many churches, human and civil rights advocates, and cosmopolitan advocates of maximum diversity.

Closely related and supportive of this bloc are the ethnic and immigration lobbies – and their rent-seeking service providers in government, non-profits, and the legal profession. The ethnic and immigrant lobbies have acquired an unprecedented amount of political clout – particularly within the Democratic Party – to expand legal admissions and tolerate illegal settlement. Under-enforcement of immigration rules has become a form of patronage.

Well-funded and broadly supported environmental, population, and conservation groups might have been a serious counterweight to policies of forced-draft population growth through immigration. But they and their funders often fear immigration as a divisive issue – or join those who consider generous admissions as a priority U.S. humanitarian mission.

## ***A U.S. Immigration Regime with Growth Built In***

Even without legal expansion of immigration, rising numbers are built into existing U.S. laws and practices. Entries of close family members of citizens have no limits. Neither do refugee and asylee admissions. Both categories then usher in cascading family reunification.

Over time, Washington has developed myriad ways to admit people to the U.S. other than through rationed legal immigration visas: temporary protected status, parole, deferred enforced departure, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or just

plain non-enforcement of legally prescribed deportations. The executive branch, by practice and by loosely-written legislation, has assumed enormous discretionary authority. It will take a united and determined Congress to curb those powers and reassert its traditional “plenary powers over immigration.”

Events within the U.S. and grave trends beyond its borders between now and midcentury will go far in determining whether America can recognize – and act on – the vital need for a rigorous balance between its population and its environmental and resource limits.



### NOTES

1. Center for Immigration Studies, *U.S. Immigrant Population Record 41.3 Million in 2013*, September 2014.
2. United Nations, ESA, Population Division, Press Release, Sept. 11, 2013: *232 Million International Migrants Living Abroad Worldwide*.
3. Pew Social Trends: *U.S. Birth Rate Falls to a Record Low*, Nov. 29, 2012.
4. *Washington Times*, October 9, 2014.
5. United Nations, Economic and Social Affairs: *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*.
6. Patrick Gerland, et al: “World Population Stability Unlikely This Century,” *Science*, October 10, 2014; U.N. Population Division, Probabilistic Population Projections – Based on *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*.
7. Gallup.com: *700 Million Worldwide Desire to Migrate Permanently*, Nov. 2, 2009.

**About the author:** *David Simcox is a Senior Advisor of NPG. From 1985 to 1992 he was executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank. From 1956 to 1985, Simcox was a career diplomat of the U.S. Department of State, with service in diplomatic posts in Latin America, Africa, Europe, and in Washington. His diplomatic assignments involved formulation of policy for labor, population and migration issues in such countries as Mexico, Panama, Dominican Republic, Brazil, and the nations of Indo-China. Simcox is a frequent contributor on population, immigration and Latin American matters to national newspapers and periodicals, and has testified on several occasions before congressional committees on immigration, labor and identification policies. He holds degrees from the University of Kentucky, American University, and the National War College. Simcox is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and saw service in the Korean conflict.*



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