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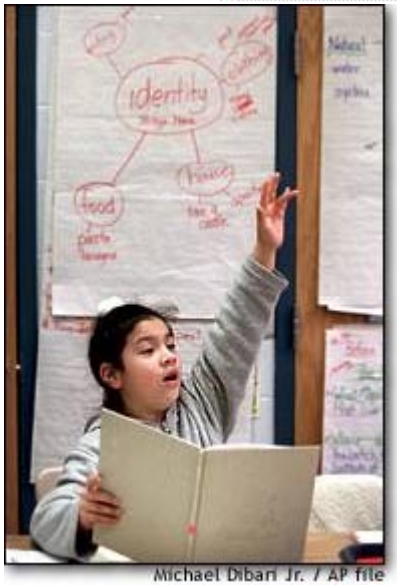
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Michael Dibari Jr. / AP file

Jackie Rivas, 8, seeks her third-grade teacher's attention in January during a reading class for students of English as a second language at Rosemont Elementary School in Gaithersburg, Md.

How newcomers are changing U.S.

Results of census survey give preview of 2000 data

MSNBC STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON, Aug. 6 — More than 13.3 million immigrants arrived in the United States during the 1990s, changing the face of schools and communities not only on America's shores, but in its midsection as well, the Census Bureau reported Monday. Nearly one-fifth of America's school-age children now speak a language other than English at home, and that home is more likely to be outside the states immigrants traditionally have settled in, the bureau said in a preview of official census data due next year.

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Estimates from the wide-ranging nationwide survey being released Monday come as lawmakers and advocacy groups debate how to shape policy on immigration and bilingual education.

THE INCREASE in immigration means that approximately 44 percent of the nation's total immigrant population of 30.5 million arrived in the United States in the 1990s, the bureau reported.

Overall, the immigrant population now accounts for about 11 percent of the country's household population of 273.4 million, according to estimates from the wide-ranging nationwide survey.

The numbers for school-age children reflect youngsters ages 5 to 17 who get most of their formal education in English but speak a second language with their families: about 9.8 million, or 18 percent of that group, compared with 14 percent in the 1990 census.

Close to 7 in 10 of the children spoke Spanish at home, the 2000 survey found, and two-thirds of that group rated themselves as speaking English very well. Fluency declines as people get older, as 50 percent of those ages 18 to 64 who spoke Spanish at home described themselves as speaking English very well.

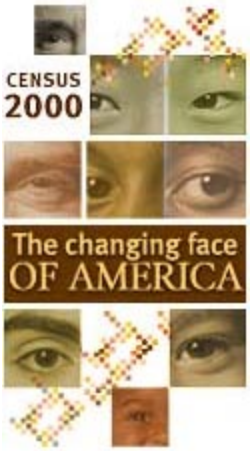
The preliminary survey, based on detailed interviews of 700,000 U.S. households at the same time the full census was conducted, also found that the new immigrants are not necessarily flocking to traditional newcomer locations like California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Texas. The percentage of immigrants living outside those states grew by 50 percent in the 1990s, increasing to 15 percent of the overall total from 10 percent.

AN ECONOMIC STIMULUS

The states where the number of new immigrants were highest tended to benefit from the decade's economic upswing, William H. Frey, a demographer at the University of Michigan, told The New York Times. In a dozen states, more than half the population was born in other states or overseas, he said.

More of the immigrants of the 1990s came from Mexico than anywhere else, according to the survey, which did not offer estimates on the number of undocumented immigrants in America.

The findings come as lawmakers and advocacy groups debate how to shape policy on immigration and



bilingual education.

Results from the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey are in line with earlier estimates of the foreign-born population — one of the fastest-growing groups in the country.

Survey information was gathered separately from the 2000 census and provides estimates of demographic trends expected to be reflected in additional census data due out next year.

The survey also covers such topics as income and poverty, educational attainment, commuting times and fertility. It is not considered a substitute for the official 2000 census figures.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Among other highlights in the report released Monday:

■ The median household income was $41,343, meaning half was above and half below that point, while 12.5 percent of all Americans lived in poverty in 2000. The bureau considers its official estimates of income and poverty from the Current Population Survey to be more reliable; those figures will be released next month.

■ The median monthly gross rent was $612 last year. The 1990 figure, adjusted for inflation, was $589. In 2000, the median monthly costs for homeowners with a mortgage was $1,307, and the median value of an owner-occupied home was $120,162.

■ Americans' average commuting time in 2000 was about 24 minutes, up from 22.4 minutes in 1990. Seventy-six percent of workers age 16 and older drove alone to get to their jobs, while about 11 percent carpooled.

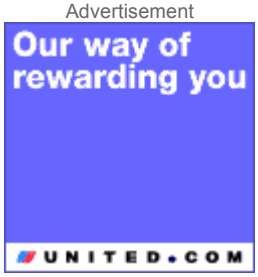
■ More than 56 percent of Americans age 15 and over were married in 2000, the survey found, compared with 55 percent in 1990. Ten percent of people in the same age range were divorced, compared with 9 percent a decade ago.

■ Twenty-four percent of all families raising their own children under 18 were headed by a woman with no husband living at home, compared to 22 percent in the 2000 census. The survey also found a slightly lower share of all families with their own children headed by married couples — 70 percent, compared with 72 percent in the census.

■ About 2.4 million grandparents were responsible for a grandchild under 18 who lived in their home, the survey found. Of those, 19 percent had income below poverty level at some point in the 12 months before answering the survey.

■ Of the nation's 104.7 million occupied housing units,

more than half used natural gas for heat — unchanged from the 1990 census. More people are using electricity for heat: 31 percent of occupied homes in 2000, compared with 26 percent a decade ago.

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FOCUS ON LATINOS

Much of the recent attention on the census from Congress and the White House has focused on figures that showed the Latino population grew 58 percent over the 1990s, to 35 million. Latinos now rival non-Latino blacks as the nation's largest minority group.

The new numbers offer more evidence of the diverse makeup of American youngsters and show the need to expand bilingual education programs, said Lisa Navarette of the National Council of La Raza, the nation's largest Latino advocacy group.

She said the survey also helps to dispel the notion that children who speak Spanish at home have difficulty conversing in English.

A critic of bilingual education wondered why more school-age children who speak Spanish did not rate themselves as speaking English very well.

"The figures should be closer to 100 percent," said Ron Unz, chairman of the Palo Alto, Calif.-based English for the Children, who successfully pushed a California ballot question in 1998 dismantling the state's bilingual education program. "If the schools are failing to teach English, that's a crime."

ESTIMATES ON UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

Nearly 29 percent of the foreign born population, or 8.8 million, came from Mexico, the survey estimated.

About 78 percent of the foreign born from Mexico were not citizens, compared with half of those from Asia and 45 percent of the foreign born from Europe.

While the survey did not provide estimates of undocumented immigrants, an Immigration and Naturalization Service survey places the number of illegal aliens in the country at about 7 million, with 5 million entering during the 1990s.

Urban Institute demographer Jeffrey Passel said the illegal immigrant population could be as high as 8.5 million, with at least half coming from Mexico.

The Bush administration is considering whether to give eventual permanent legal status to some undocumented Mexicans in the United States.

"The difference between now and the turn of the 20th century is that there is no foreseeable slowdown in immigration," Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, an author of a 1996 law that cracked down on illegal immigrants, said last week at a hearing of the House Judiciary

subcommittee on immigration.

The supplementary survey was distributed to 700,000 households in 1,203 counties nationwide. It was administered at the same time as the 2000 census, but the census itself provided a broader picture of social trends because it was based upon forms mailed to 120 million households.

Unlike the census, the survey did not count people in group quarters, such as prisons, college dormitories and nursing homes. Therefore, the estimates could be a little lower than the actual number, the bureau said.

In addition, direct comparisons to the 1990 census and more recent bureau reports were impossible for many topics in the new survey because of the different sample sizes, different margins of error for each state and different data collection methods.

The report is part of a Census Bureau test to see whether such a survey done every year can replace the census long-form questionnaire sent out every 10 years.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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