

The Foreign-Born Population in the United States

Population Characteristics

March
2000

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This report describes the foreign-born population in the United States in 2000. It provides a profile of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, such as region of birth, geographic distribution in the United States, age, educational attainment, earnings, and poverty status. These characteristics are compared with those of the native population, and because the foreign born are a heterogeneous group, variability within the foreign-born population is also discussed.¹ The findings are based on data collected by the Census Bureau in the March 2000 Current Population Survey (CPS).²

Simply put, the *Foreign Born* were not U.S. citizens at birth. *Natives* were born in the United States or a U.S. Island Area such as Puerto Rico, or born abroad of at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen.

POPULATION SIZE AND COMPOSITION

One-third of the foreign-born population is from Mexico or another Central American country.

In 2000, 28.4 million foreign born resided in the United States, representing 10.4 percent of the total U.S. population. Among the foreign born, 51.0 percent were born in Latin America³, 25.5 percent were born in Asia, 15.3 percent were born in Europe, and the remaining 8.1 percent were born in other regions of the world.⁴ The foreign-born

³Latin America includes Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.

⁴For more information on the countries included in each of the six regions of the world used in this report, see Schmidley and Gibson, 1999, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 1997*, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-195, Washington, D.C.

¹For similar comparisons between the Hispanic and White, not Hispanic populations in the United States, see Therrien, Melissa, 2001, *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 2000*, Current Population Reports, P20-535, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

²The population universe for the March 2000 CPS is the civilian noninstitutional population of the United States and members of the Armed Forces in the United States living off post or with their families on post, but excludes all other members of the Armed Forces.

Figure 1.
Foreign Born by Region of Birth: 2000
(In percent)

LATIN AMERICA 51.0

Central America 34.5

EUROPE 15.3

Caribbean 9.9

ASIA 25.5

South America 6.6

OTHER
REGIONS 8.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Current Population Reports

By Lisa Lollock

population from Central America (including Mexico) accounted for nearly two-thirds of the foreign born from Latin America and for about one-third of the total foreign born (see Figure 1).

The foreign born are more geographically concentrated than the native population.

In 2000, 39.9 percent of the foreign-born population lived in the West, 26.8 percent in the South, 22.6 percent in the Northeast, and 10.7 percent in the Midwest. Among natives, 35.9 percent lived in the South, 24.6 percent in the Midwest, 20.8 percent in the West, and 18.6 percent in the Northeast (see Figure 2).

The foreign born from Latin America were more likely to live in the West (42.1 percent) and South (32.6 percent) than those from other regions of the world. The foreign born from Central America (who represent two-thirds of the foreign born from Latin America) were also concentrated the most in the West (58.5 percent) and South (27.4 percent). The Latin American foreign born from the Caribbean and from South America were concentrated in the Northeast (45.5 percent and 46.0 percent, respectively) and the South (48.7 percent and 35.3 percent, respectively).⁵ Nearly half of the foreign born from Asia lived in the West (47.8 percent).

The foreign born are more likely than the native population to live in central cities of metropolitan areas.

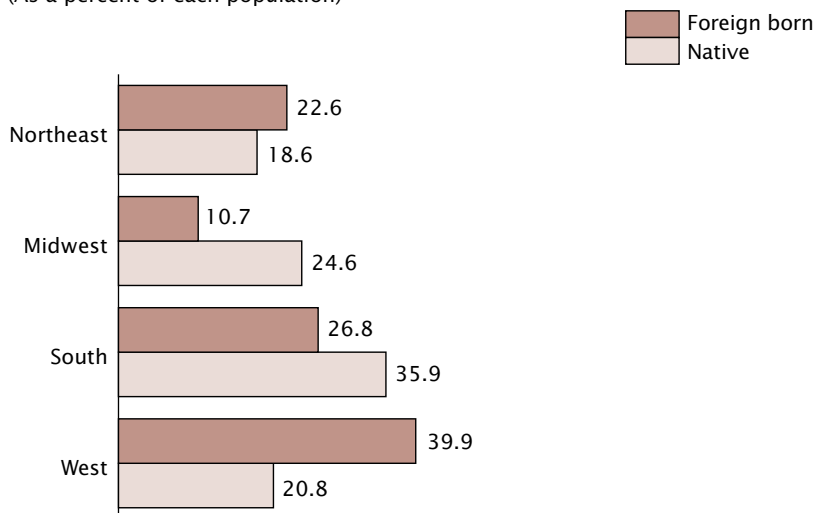
Almost half of the foreign born lived in a central city in a metropolitan area (45.1 percent) compared with slightly more than one-quarter of the

⁵The percentages living in the Northeast and South are not significantly different for either the Caribbean or South America.

Figure 2.

Population by Nativity and Region of Residence: 2000

(As a percent of each population)

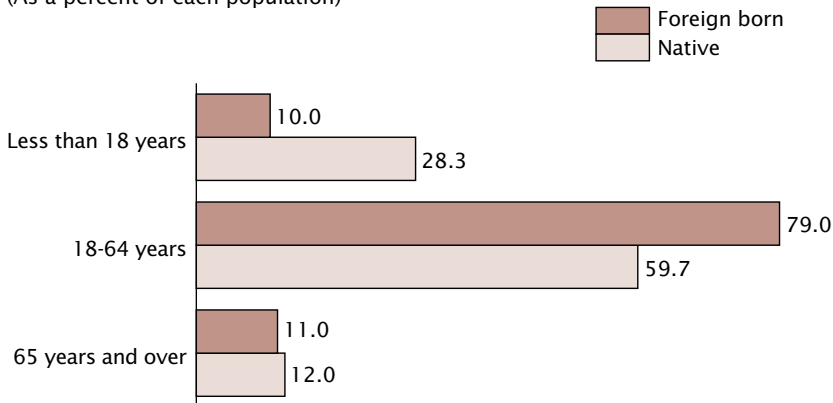


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 3.

Population by Nativity and Age Group: 2000

(As a percent of each population)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

native population (27.5 percent). The percentage living outside central cities but within a metropolitan area was slightly less for the foreign born than for the native population (49.8 percent and 51.9 percent, respectively). The percentage of the foreign born living in nonmetropolitan areas (5.1 percent) was much smaller than the percentage of natives (20.7 percent).

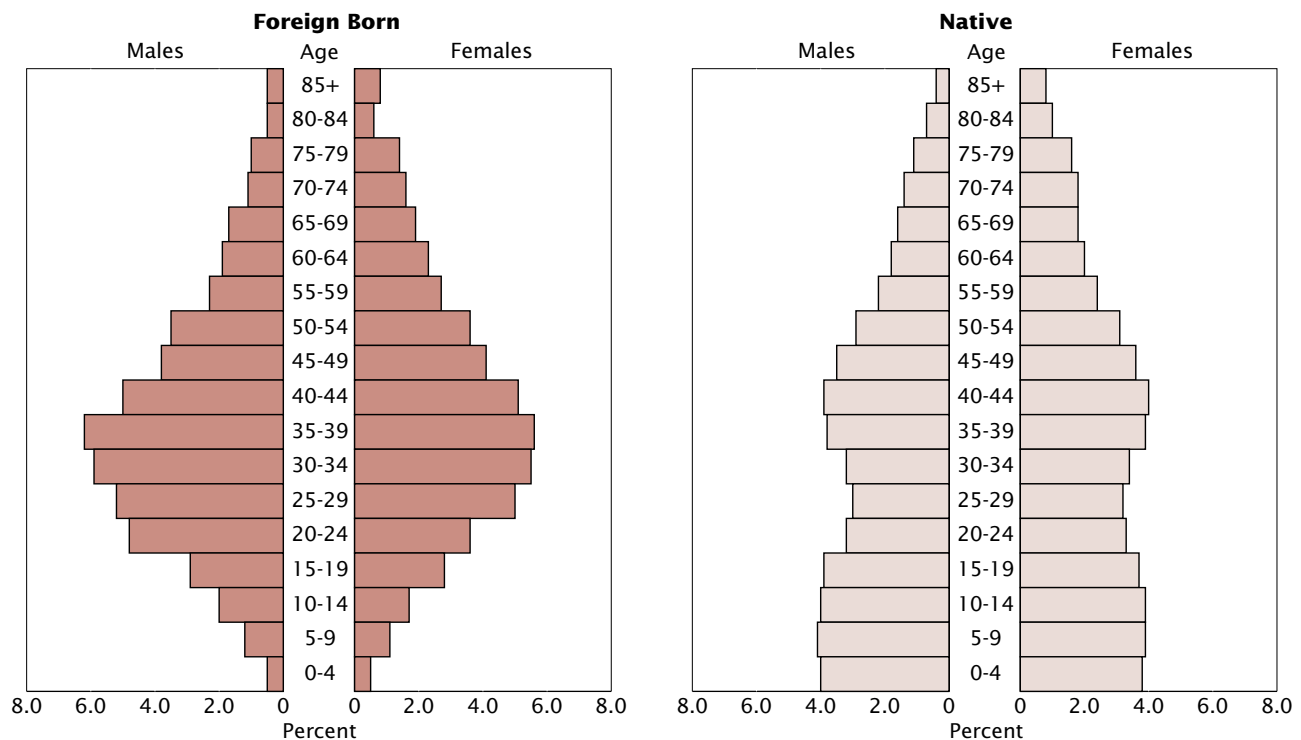
The foreign born are more likely than natives to be 18 to 64 years of age.

In 2000, 79.0 percent of the foreign born were 18 to 64 years of age, whereas 59.7 percent of natives were in this age group (see Figure 3). More specifically, whereas 43.6 percent of the foreign born were ages 25 to 44, 28.6 percent of the native population were in this age group.

Figure 4.

Population by Nativity, Age, and Sex: 2000

(In percent)¹



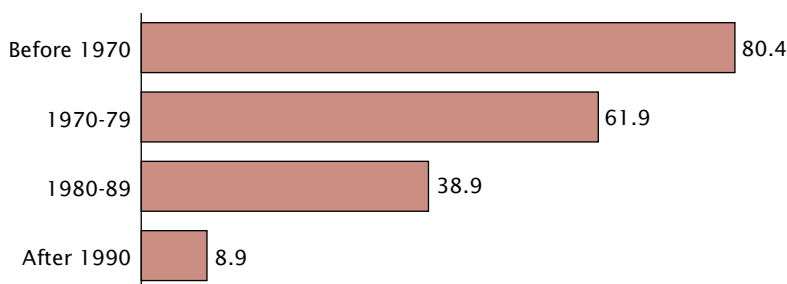
¹Each bar represents the percent of the foreign-born (native) population who were within the specified age group and of the specified sex.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 5.

U.S. Citizenship of the Foreign-Born Population by Year of Entry: 2000

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Among the foreign born, 24.3 percent were 45 to 64 years old compared with 21.7 percent of natives (see Figure 4).

The proportion age 65 and over was about the same for the foreign born (11.0 percent) and natives (12.0 percent). Relatively few foreign born were less than 18 years of age (10.0 percent) compared with 28.3 percent

of the native population. The small proportion of foreign born in the youngest age group occurred because most of the children of foreign-born parents are natives.

More than one of every three foreign born are naturalized citizens.

Among the foreign born in 2000, 39.5 percent entered the United States in the 1990s, another 28.3 percent came in the 1980s, 16.2 percent entered in the 1970s, and the remaining 16.0 percent arrived before 1970.⁶ Among those who arrived before 1970, 80.4 percent had obtained citizenship by 2000. Of those who entered from 1970 to 1979, 61.9 percent had obtained citizenship by 2000, compared with 38.9 percent of those

⁶The percentage of foreign born who entered in the 1970s is not statistically different from the percentage who entered before 1970.

who entered from 1980 to 1989, and only 8.9 percent of those who entered from 1990 to 1999 (see Figure 5).⁷

FAMILY HOUSEHOLD SIZE AND MARITAL STATUS

The foreign born live in family households that are larger than those of natives.

In 2000, 26.6 percent of family households in which a foreign-born person was the householder consisted of five or more people.⁸ In contrast, only 13.2 percent of native family households were this large. Among foreign-born family households, the proportion with five or more people varied from 42.1 percent when the householder was from Central America to 9.8 percent when the householder was from Europe (see Figure 6).⁹

Among the population 15 years and over, the foreign born were more likely to be currently married¹⁰ than natives (61.0 percent compared with 53.2 percent). Of the foreign born, naturalized citizens had a higher proportion married (66.4 percent) than non-citizens (57.4 percent).¹¹

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Two of three foreign born have graduated from high school.

The foreign-born population age 25 and over was less likely to have graduated from high school than

⁷After migration to the United States, some foreign-born residents become naturalized citizens. This process usually requires 5 years of residence in the United States.

⁸Family households consist of two or more people, at least one of whom is related to the householder (the person who owns or rents the housing unit). Foreign-born households have a foreign-born householder.

⁹The percentage of family households that contained five or more people did not differ significantly between those maintained by a foreign-born person from Asia, the Caribbean, South America, or other regions.

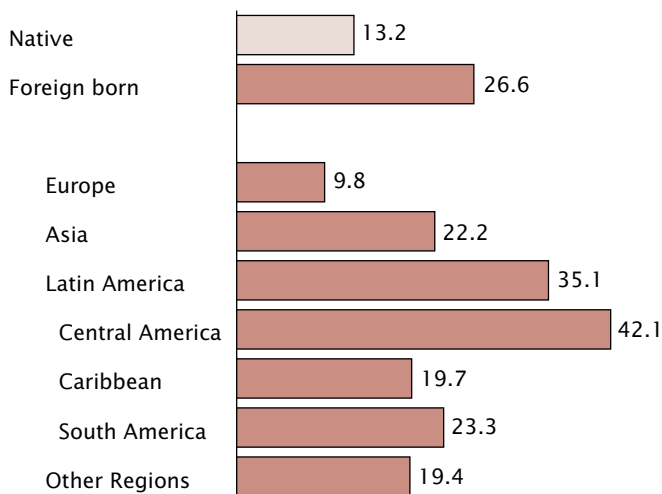
¹⁰Includes cases in which the spouse is absent, but excludes those who are separated.

¹¹Marital status is calculated for those age 15 and over.

Figure 6.

Family Households With Five or More People by Nativity and World Region of Birth: 2000

(In percent)¹



¹Each bar represents the percent of family households, whose householder was born in the specified area, that consisted of 5 or more people.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 7.

Population by Nativity and Educational Attainment: 2000

(As a percent of each population age 25 and over)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

natives (67.0 percent and 86.6 percent, respectively). In addition, more than one-fifth of the foreign born had less than a ninth-grade education (22.2 percent) compared with

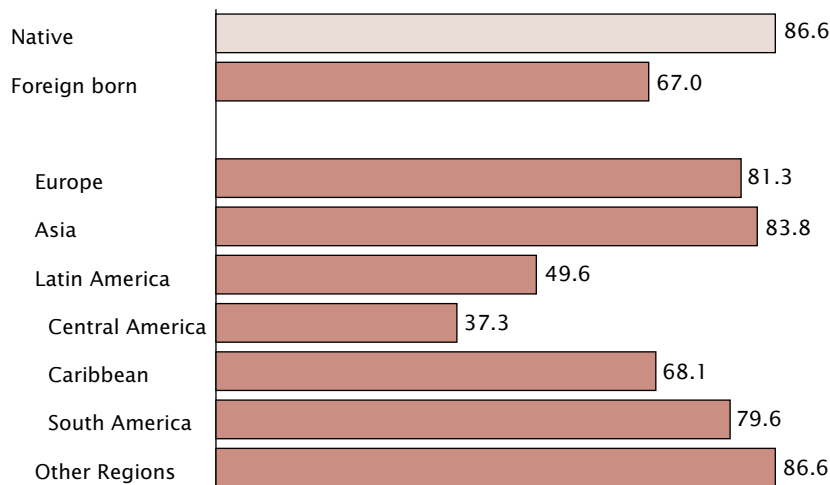
about one-twentieth of the native population (4.7 percent).

The proportions with a bachelor's degree or more education were not significantly different between the

Figure 8.

Population With at Least a High School Education by Nativity and World Region of Birth: 2000

(In percent)¹



¹Each bar represents the percent of individuals age 25 and over, who were born in the specified area, who have at least a high school education.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

foreign-born (25.8 percent) and the native population (25.6 percent, see Figure 7). The foreign born who were naturalized citizens were more likely to have graduated from high school than the foreign born who were not citizens (76.2 percent and 59.8 percent, respectively).

Educational attainment among the foreign born varies by region of birth.

The highest percentages of high school graduates were found among Asians, Europeans, and those from other regions (83.8 percent, 81.3 percent, and 86.6 percent, respectively), compared with Latin Americans (49.6 percent). Among the foreign born from Latin America, those from South America were most likely to have graduated from high school (79.6 percent), and those

from Central America were the least likely (37.3 percent), as shown in Figure 8.¹² The proportion who had attained a bachelor's degree ranged from 44.9 percent for those from Asia to 5.5 percent for those from Central America.

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The foreign born are more likely to be unemployed than natives.

In March 2000, 4.9 percent of the foreign born in the civilian labor force were unemployed compared with 4.3 percent of natives.¹³ Unemployment rates were similar between foreign-born men (4.5 percent) and native men (4.4 percent),

¹²The percentages of foreign born from Europe and Asia with a high school degree or more were not significantly different from each other or from the percentage of those from South America. The percentage of Asians that had graduated from high school was not significantly different from the percentages from other regions.

¹³Civilian labor force data shown in this report reflect characteristics of the civilian noninstitutionalized population age 15 and over for March 2000 and are not adjusted for seasonal changes. Data released by the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, may not agree entirely with data shown in this report because of differences in methodological procedures and their seasonal adjustment of the data.

but differed between foreign-born women (5.5 percent) and native women (4.2 percent).¹⁴

Foreign-born workers were more likely than native workers to be in service occupations (19.2 percent and 13.2 percent, respectively).¹⁵ Conversely, 24.7 percent of the foreign born were in managerial or professional specialty occupations, compared with 30.9 percent of natives. Among the foreign born, the percentage of workers in managerial or professional specialty occupations ranged from 7.0 percent of those from Central America to 38.7 percent of those from Asia.¹⁶

The foreign born earn less than natives.

In 1999, 36.3 percent of foreign-born full-time, year-round workers and 21.3 percent of native workers earned less than \$20,000.¹⁷ Among foreign-born workers, the proportions earning less than \$20,000 ranged from 57.1 percent of those from Central America to 16.2 percent of those from Europe and 22.4 percent from Asia.¹⁸ More natives earned \$50,000 or more (24.6 percent) than foreign born (19.1 percent).

¹⁴The unemployment rates were not statistically different between native women and native or foreign-born men, or between foreign-born women and foreign-born men.

¹⁵The occupational classification system used here and by the Bureau of Labor Statistics is the one used in the 1990 Census of Population and is based largely on the 1980 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC).

¹⁶The percentage of foreign-born workers from Asia who were in executive, administrative, or managerial occupations did not differ from the percentage from Europe or other regions.

¹⁷Data on earnings and poverty in this report refer to the calendar year before the survey. In this case, earnings information collected in March 2000 refers to calendar year 1999.

¹⁸The percentage of foreign born from South America who earned less than \$20,000 was not significantly different from the percentage from Asia.

The foreign born are more likely to live in poverty than natives.

In 1999, 16.8 percent of foreign-born residents were living below the poverty level, compared with 11.2 percent of natives.¹⁹ The foreign born without U.S. citizenship were more than twice as likely to live in poverty (21.3 percent) as foreign-born naturalized citizens (9.1 percent).²⁰ Among the foreign born, Latin Americans had the highest poverty rate, whereas Europeans had the lowest (21.9 percent and 9.3 percent, respectively).²¹ Among Latin Americans, the poverty rate was lowest for South Americans (11.5 percent), in comparison with Central Americans and Caribbeans (24.2 percent and 20.6 percent, respectively), as shown in Figure 9.²²

SOURCE OF THE DATA

Estimates in this report come from data obtained in March 2000 by the CPS. The Census Bureau conducts the CPS every month, although this report uses only data from the March survey.

ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and meet the Census Bureau's standards for statistical significance. Nonsampling errors in surveys may

¹⁹Poverty status is based on a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition (see Dalaker, Joseph, 2000. *Poverty in the United States: 1999*. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P20-207; or www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty.html).

²⁰The poverty rate for naturalized citizens was not significantly different from the rate for natives.

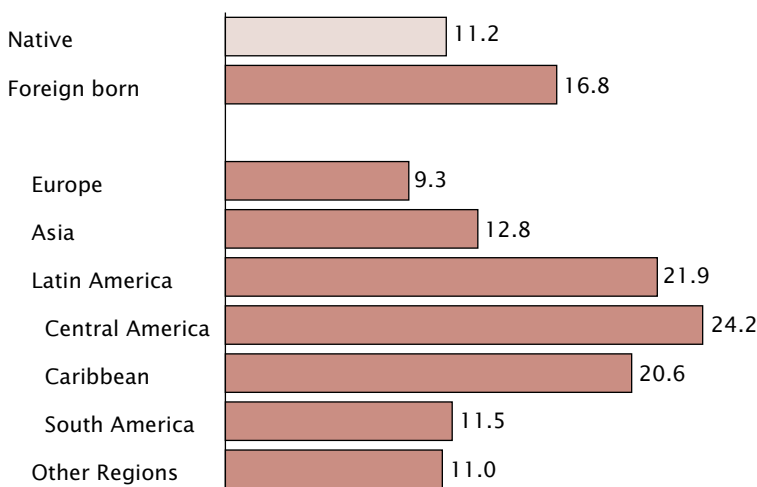
²¹The poverty rates for those from Europe, Asia, and other regions were not statistically different.

²²The poverty rates for those from Central America and the Caribbean were not statistically different.

Figure 9.

People Living Below the Poverty Level by Nativity and World Region of Birth: 2000

(In percent)¹



¹Each bar represents the percent of individuals, who were born in the specified area, who were living in poverty.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately the answers are coded and classified. The Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process — including the overall design of surveys, the wording of questions, reviews of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports.

The Current Population Survey employs ratio estimation, whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but how it affects different variables in the survey is not precisely known. Moreover, biases may also be present when people who are missed in the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than

the categories used in weighting (age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin). All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

For further information on statistical standards and the computation and use of standard errors, contact Jeffrey Stratton at the Census Bureau Demographic Statistical Methods Division on the Internet at: dsmd_s&a@census.gov.

MORE INFORMATION

Sixty detailed tables from the March 2000 CPS are available on the Internet, at the Census Bureau's Web site (www.census.gov). Once on the site, click on "F," then select "Foreign Born Population Data." Under "CPS March 2000" choose "Data Tables." Data from previous years (1995-1999) are also available on this Web site.

To receive a paper version of these tables, send your request for "PPL-135, Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: March 2000," along with a check or money order in the amount of \$38.80, payable to "Commerce-Census-88-00-9010," U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, P.O. Box 277943, Atlanta, GA 30384-7943, or call the Statistical Information Office at 301-457-2422. A copy of these tables will be made available to any existing Current Population Report P20 subscriber without charge, provided that the request is made within 3 months of the issue date of this report.

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The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of data and report users. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

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