

# Children of Immigrants

## Family and Parental Characteristics



Brief No. 2

THE URBAN INSTITUTE 

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This data brief is the second in a series that profiles children of immigrants using up-to-date census data and other sources.<sup>1</sup> The first brief highlighted the fast growth of the immigrant population and the increase in children of immigrants, along with important demographic trends. The current publication describes the family circumstances of children of immigrants, including family structure and parental employment.

### Half of Children of Immigrants Live with Two Foreign-Born Parents, and a Quarter Live with a Native-Born and a Foreign-Born Parent

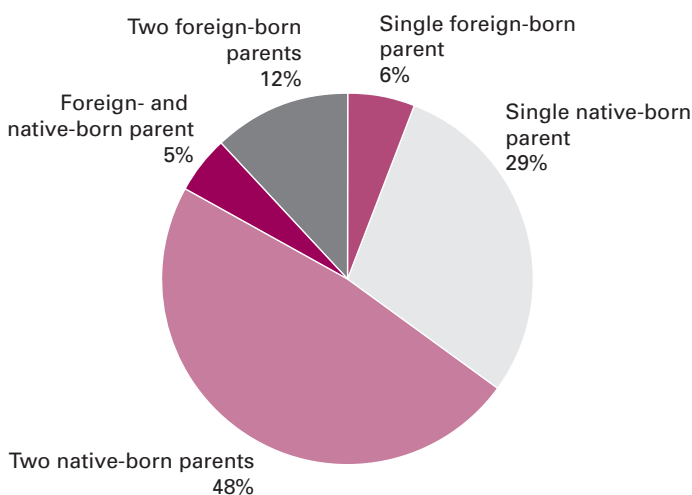
■ Twenty-three percent of U.S. children live with at least one foreign-born parent in the household (figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Children with two foreign-born parents account for 12 percent of all children, and those living with a single foreign-born parent compose 6 percent of all U.S. children. Children living with one foreign- and one native-born parent represent 5 percent of U.S. children.

- Among children of immigrants, half (52 percent) live with two foreign-born parents (figure 2). About a quarter (24 percent) live with a single foreign-born parent, and the same share live with a foreign- and a native-born parent.
- Children with parents from the Middle East and South Asia (“Middle East” for short) are the most likely to live with two foreign-born parents (73 percent) and the least likely to live with a single parent.<sup>3</sup> Children with parents from Europe, Canada, and Australia (“Europe”), on the other hand, are the most likely to live with a foreign- and a native-born parent (51 percent).
- Children of Central American origin are the most likely to live with a single foreign-born parent (38 percent), followed by children with parents from Africa and the West Indies (“Africa,” 34 percent) and children with parents from Mexico (28 percent).

### Children of Immigrants Are More Likely to Live with Both Parents and to Live in Larger Families

- Children of immigrants are more likely than children of natives to live in two-parent families (76 percent compared with 62 percent).<sup>4</sup> The rate for immigrant families is higher than the rate for native families but varies considerably by region of origin (figure 3). Children with parents from the Middle East, East Asia and Pacific (“East Asia”), and Europe are the most likely to live in two-parent families (rates of 85 percent or higher).
- The proportion of children in two-parent families is lower for those whose parents are from Central America (62 percent) and Africa (66 percent), and it is similar to the rate for children of natives. The lower share of children living with both parents for some groups is partially explained by obstacles to family unification; for example, 17 percent of children of African origin in one-parent families have parents that are married.
- Children of immigrants also live in larger families than children of natives.<sup>5</sup> Twenty-six percent of children of

Figure 1. Children by Nativity of Parents, 2008

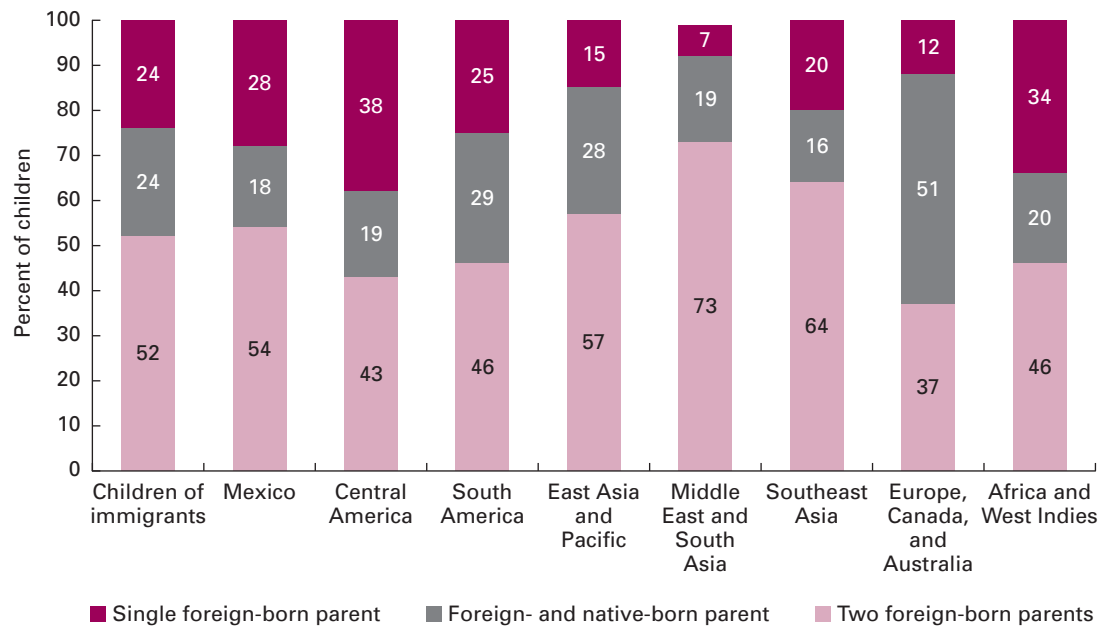


Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: The IPUMS data identify one or both parents (biological and social) if the parent(s) are living in the same household as the child.



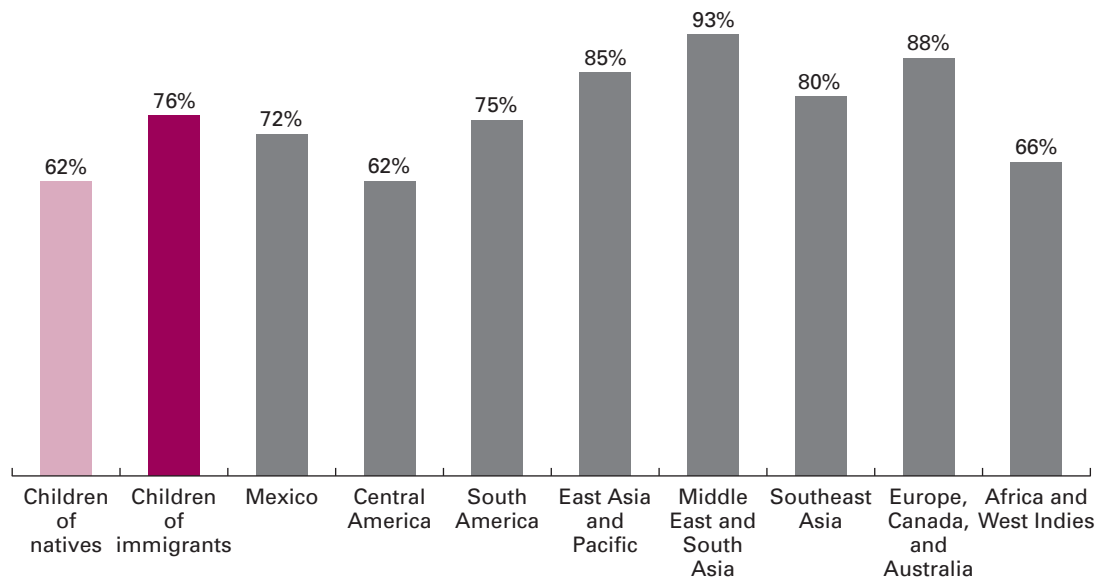
**Figure 2.** *Children of Immigrants by Nativity of Parents and Family Structure, 2008*



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: The IPUMS data identify one or both parents (biological and social) if the parent(s) are living in the same household as the child.

**Figure 3.** *Children Living in Two-Parent Families by Nativity and Parental Origin, 2008*



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Two-parent families are married couples living in the same household.



immigrants, compared with 14 percent of children of natives, are in families with three or more adults including parent(s) and other relatives. Children with Southeast Asian parents (34 percent), Mexican parents (29 percent), and Central American parents (26 percent) are the most likely to live with three or more related adults, while children with European parents are the least likely (16 percent).

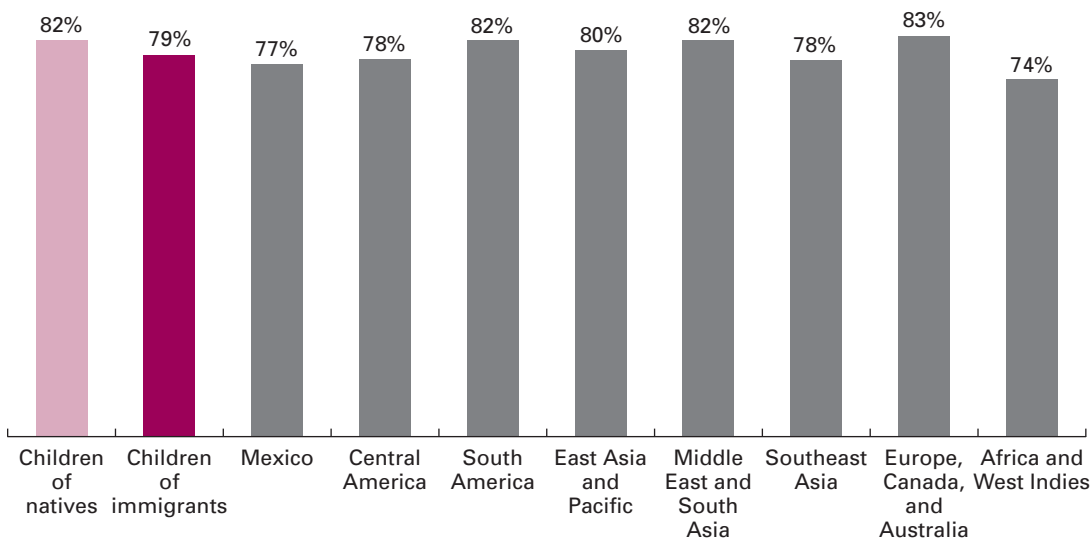
### Immigrant Families Exhibit High Work Effort

- Immigrant families and native families both show similarly high parental work effort. Ninety-two percent of children of immigrants and 89 percent of children of natives live in families where the adults worked at least 1,800 hours combined or the equivalent of full-time, full-year employment the prior year. For immigrant families, this is true generally and across regions of origin, with little variation across regions.
- Similar shares of children of immigrants and children of natives have fathers that work full time, defined as working 1,800 or more hours annually (79 versus 82 percent, figure 4). There

is little variation in father's work effort by immigrant origin. Children of European origin are the most likely to have a father that works full time (83 percent), while children of African origin are the least likely (74 percent).

- Mothers' work patterns vary more broadly between immigrant and native families and among immigrant families by regions of origin. The share of children of immigrants with mothers working 1,000 or more hours is lower than for children of natives (50 percent versus 60 percent, as shown in figure 5). Thirty-five percent of children of immigrants have mothers working full time, compared with 41 percent of children of natives.
- While most immigrant mothers from each region of origin are working, the rates of maternal employment and level of work effort across the regions of origin vary significantly. Only 53 and 52 percent, respectively, of children of Mexican and Middle East origin have working mothers, and only 27 percent of children with mothers from these regions of origin have mothers who work full time. By contrast, 77 percent of children of African origin and 74 percent of children of Southeast Asian origin have working mothers.

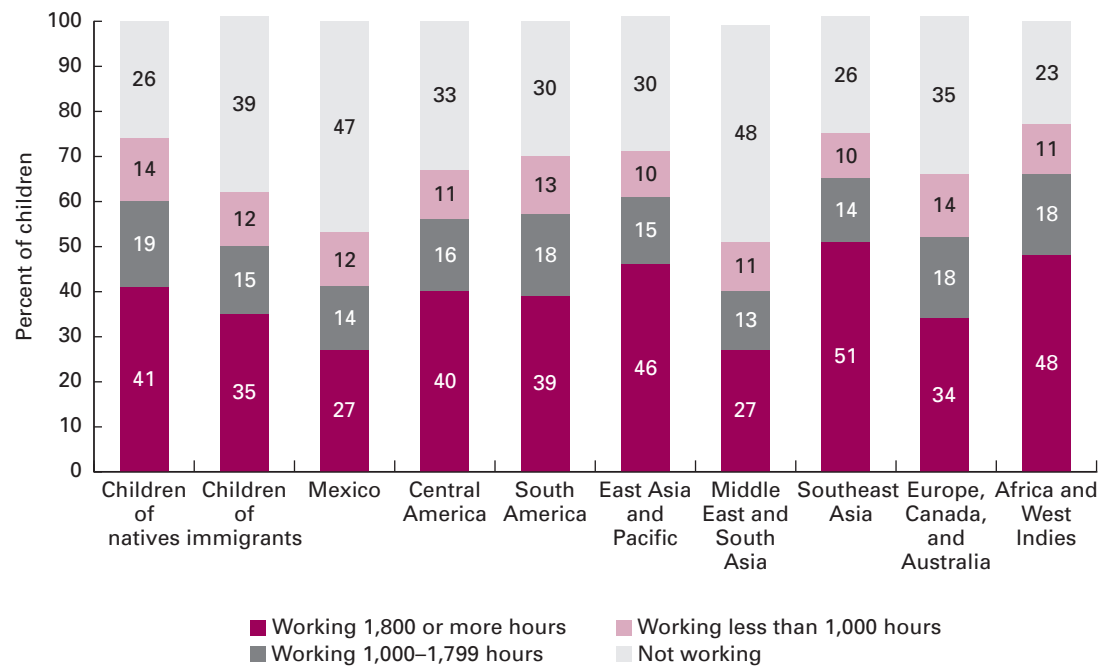
**Figure 4.** Children with Fathers Working Full Time by Nativity and Parental Origin, 2007



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.



**Figure 5.** *Work Effort of Mothers by Nativity and Parental Origin, 2007*

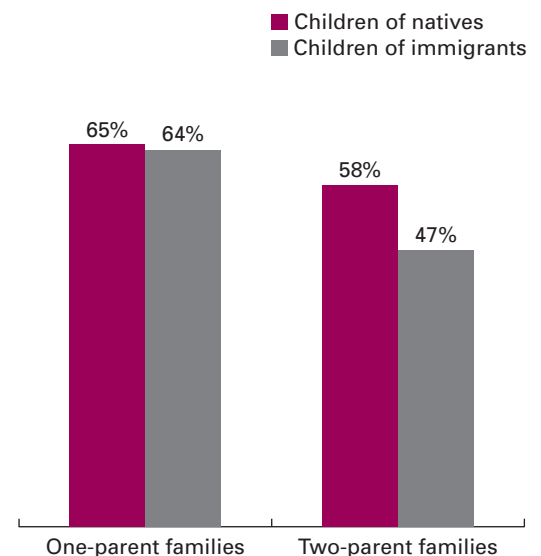


Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Children of Southeast Asian origin (51 percent), African origin (48 percent), and East Asian origin (46 percent) are the most likely to have mothers that work full time, and at a higher rate than children with native-born mothers.

- Interestingly, the entire difference in maternal employment rates seems to occur in two-parent families. So, while the incidence of two-parent families is higher for immigrants than natives, in two-parent families children of immigrants are *not* more likely than children of natives to have a mother working more than 1,000 hours or to have two working parents. Looking at maternal employment for one- versus two-parent families, there is no difference in the incidence of working mothers in single-parent families—65 percent for children of natives versus 64 percent for children of immigrants (figure 6). In two-parent families, however, children of immigrants are much less likely than children of natives to have mothers working 1,000 hours or more (47 percent versus 58 percent).

**Figure 6.** *Children with Mothers Working 1,000 or More Hours by Nativity of Parents and Family Structure, 2007*



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

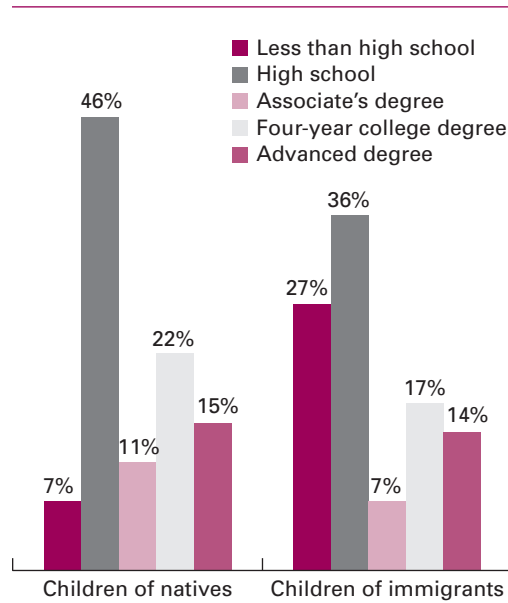
Note: Two-parent families are married couples living in the same household.



## A Quarter of Children of Immigrants Have Parents That Do Not Have High School Degrees

- Slightly more than a quarter (27 percent) of children of immigrants have parents that have not completed high school, a rate nearly four times the 7 percent rate for children of natives (figure 7). And, almost half (47 percent) of children of Mexican origin have parents with less than high school educations, compared with only 3 to 5 percent of children of European, East Asian, and Middle Eastern origin (figure 8).
- At the other end of the spectrum, children of immigrants are less likely to have college-educated parents than children of natives (17 percent versus 22 percent), but the shares of children whose parents have advanced degrees are comparable for children of immigrants and those of natives (14 and 15 percent, respectively). The advanced degree shares are more than twice as high for some immigrant groups: 41 percent of children of Middle Eastern origin, 31 percent of European origin, and 30 percent of East Asian origin have parents with advanced degrees.

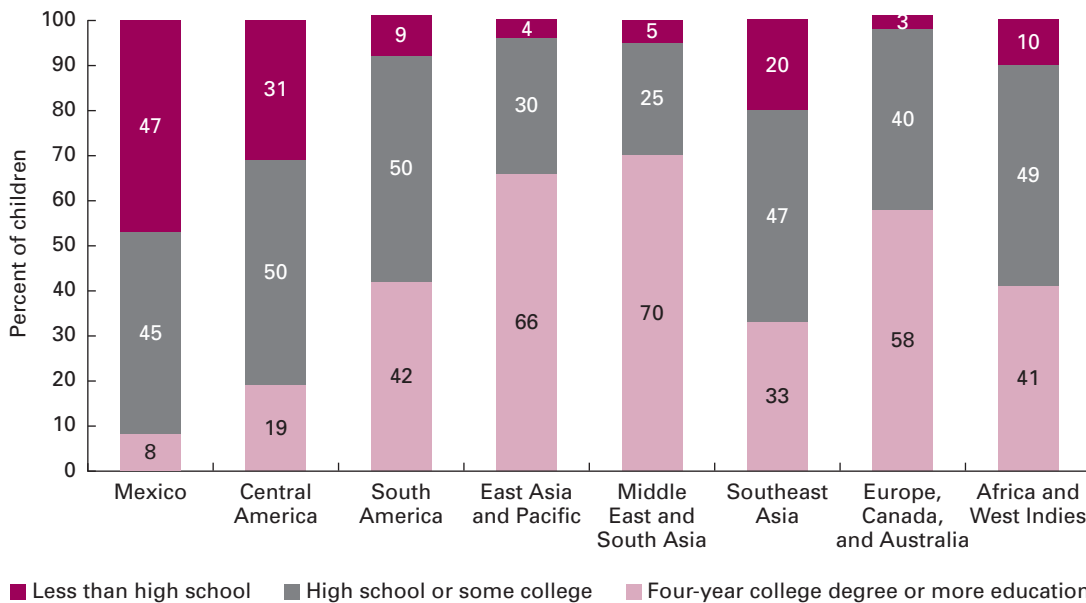
**Figure 7. Parental Education among Children by Nativity of Parents, 2008**



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Parental education is the higher educational attainment in two-parent families or the educational attainment of the single parent in one-parent families.

**Figure 8. Parental Education among Children of Immigrants by Parental Origin, 2008**

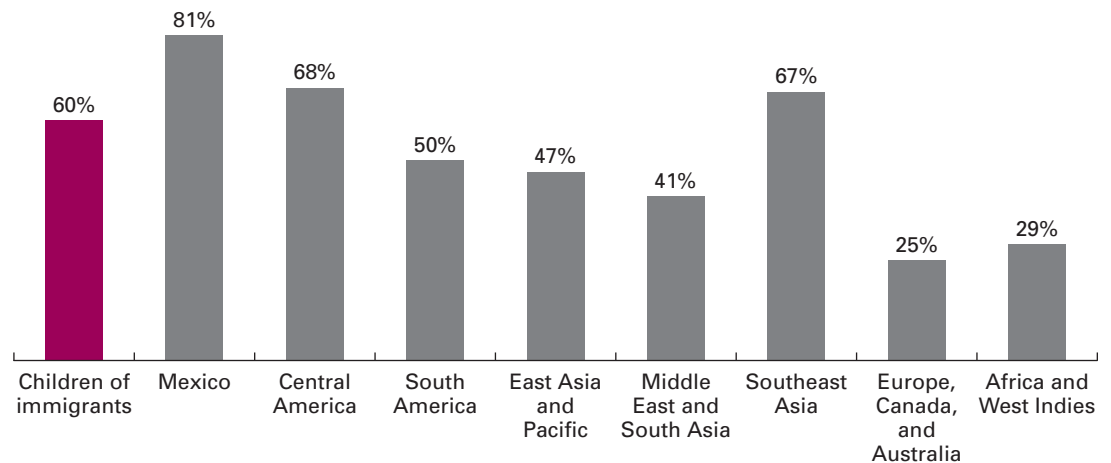


Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Parental education is the higher educational attainment in two-parent families or the educational attainment of the single parent in one-parent families.



**Figure 9.** Children of Immigrants with Limited English Proficient Parents, by Parental Origin, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Limited English proficient parents are defined as one or both parents speaking a language other than English at home and speaking English less than very well.

### Most Children of Immigrants Have Limited English Proficient Parents

- More than half (60 percent) of children of immigrants have at least one limited English proficient, or LEP, parent (figure 9).<sup>6</sup> Similar to educational attainment, English skills vary across regions of origin: 81 percent of children of Mexican origin and 68 percent of children of Central American origin have LEP parents. Children of European origin have the lowest parental LEP share (25 percent), followed by children of African origin (29 percent).
- In addition to having parents that lack English skills, a large share of children (26 percent) lives in linguistically isolated households where no person age 14 or older is English proficient. Children of Mexican origin (38 percent) and Central American origin (30 percent) are the most likely to live in linguistically isolated households, while children of European origin (8 percent) are the least likely.

### Notes

1. An immigrant or foreign-born person is someone born outside the United States and its territories. People born in the United States, Puerto Rico, and other territories, or born abroad to U.S. citizen parents, are native born. Children of immigrant parents live with at least one foreign-born parent in the household.

2. Unless stated otherwise, data in this brief are taken from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) datasets drawn from the 2008 American Community Survey (Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database], Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008). The IPUMS data identify one or both parents if the parent(s) are living in the same household as the child. The child-parent relationship is biological and social; for example, stepfathers and adoptive fathers are identified in addition to biological fathers.
3. Countries of origin are grouped based on geography, languages, being a refugee-producing country, and the available sample size in the survey data. For a child with parents from different regions of birth, the child is assigned the region of birth of the mother.
4. Two-parent families are defined as married couples living in the same household. If unmarried, cohabiting couples are included in the family definition, the shares of children living in two-parent families increases to 82 percent for children of immigrants and 69 percent for children of natives.
5. Family is defined to include the householder and all individuals living with the householder and related to him or her by birth, marriage, or adoption, as well as the unmarried partner of the householder living in the household.
6. Limited English proficient people responded to the ACS that they speak a language other than English at home and that they speak English well, not well, or not at all. Those who speak English at home or who speak another language at home but also speak English very well are considered English proficient.





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