

New York Times

11.2 Million Illegal Immigrants in U.S. in 2010, Report Says; No Change From '09

By Julia Preston

February 1, 2011

About 11.2 million illegal immigrants were living in the United States in 2010, a number essentially unchanged from the previous year, according to a report published Tuesday by the Pew Hispanic Center, a nonpartisan research organization in Washington.

Despite continuing high unemployment among American workers, record deportations by the Obama administration and expanding efforts by states to crack down, the number of unauthorized immigrants in the work force — about eight million — was also unchanged, the Pew report found. Those workers were about 5 percent of the American work force.

The population of illegal immigrants leveled off after peaking in 2007 at 12 million, then dropping sharply over two years to 11.1 million in 2009, according to the report, which is based on census data. The declines occurred primarily because fewer people from Mexico and Central America came illegally to the United States, Pew concluded.

The report found no evidence of an exodus of illegal immigrants from the country. In particular there is no sign that Mexicans, who are the largest group — 58 percent — of illegal immigrants, are leaving in larger numbers, the report finds.

The Pew report suggests that the high numbers of unauthorized immigrants are confounding enforcement efforts by the Obama administration and also a recent spate of measures by state legislatures to crack down locally on illegal immigration. Federal immigration authorities deported about 400,000 immigrants in each of the last two years, the highest numbers in the country's history, according to Department of Homeland Security officials.

“We just don't see indications that enforcement is pushing people to leave the U.S.,” said Jeffrey S. Passel, a demographer and co-author, with D'Vera Cohn, of the Pew report.

The report's findings appeared to bring bad news for groups advocating for a strategy called attrition through enforcement, which inspired many of the tougher state measures, including a law Arizona enacted last year that caused a furor. According to supporters, those laws are

intended to make life so difficult for illegal immigrants that they will opt to go home. Although much of Arizona's law was held up by federal courts, other states, including Georgia, Oklahoma and South Carolina, have also adopted tough laws in recent years.

But some advocates for that approach said the Obama administration's decision to end high-profile raids in workplaces might have contributed to illegal immigrants' remaining here.

"It could be that the shift away from work-site enforcement is making it more attractive for illegal immigrants to stay here, since they do not feel as threatened at work," said Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies at the Center for Immigration Studies, which seeks reduced immigration to the United States.

The Pew report found that about 350,000 babies were born in 2009 to families with at least one illegal immigrant parent, a number also unchanged from the previous year, representing about 8 percent of all newborns.

Conservative lawmakers in Congress and state legislatures have announced initiatives to cancel automatic United States citizenship for children born here of illegal immigrant parents. They argue that birthright citizenship, which is described in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, encourages illegal immigrants to sneak in to have babies here in order to gain American citizenship for them.

The Pew report found that about two-thirds of the illegal immigrant parents of the newborns had been living in the United States for at least five years.