

Foreign-Born Veterans of the US Armed Forces

As the United States prepares to commemorate Veterans Day on November 11, an MPI analysis provides a demographic portrait of a sometimes overlooked group of US armed forces veterans: those born in other countries.

In 2007, there were about 645,000 foreign-born veterans of the US armed forces, accounting for nearly 3 percent of all surviving US veterans.

This MPI Fact Sheet examines foreign-born veterans' countries of origin, states of residence, and periods of service. The analysis uses data from the US Census Bureau's recently released 2007 American Community Survey, an annual sampling of three million US households that collects demographic, housing, social, and economic information.

We define veterans as individuals age 17 and older who served in the military forces of the United States (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard) in time of war or peace. "Service" includes active duty in these branches of the military for any length of time and at any place at home or abroad. Except when examining veterans of specific conflicts – including the Vietnam War, the Korean conflict, and World War II – current members of the armed forces are not treated as veterans.

Who are Foreign-Born Veterans?

Naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, and certain nationals of three countries in free association with the United States — the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau — are eligible for military service. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 also grants the president the authority to expedite citizenship for foreign-born members of the armed forces. In addition, Congress can deem other foreign-born individuals eligible to serve upon special request from the military.

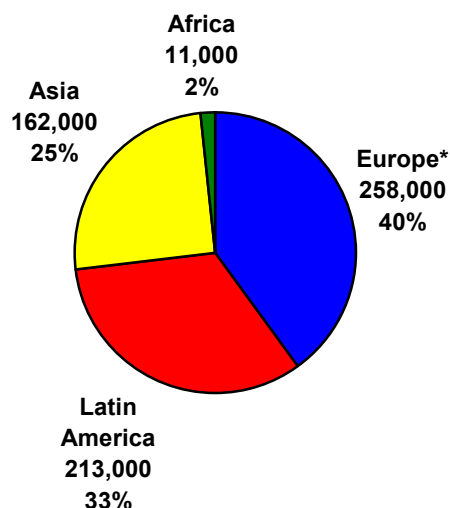
There are well over half a million foreign-born veterans in the United States.

In 2007, there were about 645,000 foreign-born veterans, or 2.8 percent of the 22.9 million veterans (excluding active-duty military personnel).

Most foreign-born veterans migrated from European and Latin American countries.

2007 American Community Survey figures show that 40 percent of foreign-born veterans migrated from a European country, Canada, or Oceania (see Figure 1). Latin America was the birthplace for the next largest number of veterans, accounting for a full third of foreign-born US veterans. One-quarter (25 percent) of foreign-born veterans migrated from Asia and the remaining 2 percent migrated from Africa.

Figure 1. Region of Birth of Foreign-Born Veterans of the US Armed Services, 2007



Notes: *Europe includes Canada and "Oceania," which includes Australia, New Zealand, and several small countries
 Source: Migration Policy Institute analysis of 2007 American Community Survey data. 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, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

The top countries of origin for foreign-born veterans were the Philippines and Mexico.

The Philippines (12 percent) was the leading country of origin for foreign-born veterans of the US armed forces (see Figure 2). The next largest countries of origin for foreign-born veterans were Mexico (11 percent), Germany (9 percent), Canada (7 percent), Italy (4 percent), and Cuba (4 percent).

Figure 2. Country of Birth of Foreign-Born Veterans of the US Armed Forces, 2007

Country	Number of Veterans	Share of Total (%)
Philippines	79,000	12%
Mexico	73,000	11%
Germany	59,000	9%
Canada	47,000	7%
Italy	26,000	4%
Cuba	23,000	4%
England	18,000	3%
Jamaica	17,000	3%
Korea	16,000	2%
Vietnam	14,000	2%
Other countries	273,000	41%

Note: Does not include individuals on active duty in the US armed forces.

Source: Migration Policy Institute analysis of 2007 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, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

California and Florida are home to one-third of all foreign-born veterans.

California is home to the largest number of foreign-born veterans of the US armed forces (152,000 or 24 percent). It is followed by Florida (72,000 or 11 percent), New York (55,000 or 8 percent), Texas (47,000 or 7 percent), New Jersey (26,000 or 4 percent), Virginia (24,000 or 4 percent), Illinois (24,000 or 4 percent), Washington (20,000 or 3 percent), Arizona (17,000 or 3 percent) and Pennsylvania (with 15,000 or 2 percent).

There are over 192,000 foreign-born veterans of the Vietnam War era.

There are over 192,000 surviving foreign-born veterans and active-duty service members who served during the Vietnam War era (between August 1964 and April 1975). They make up about 2.5 percent of the 7.7 million surviving veterans of the Vietnam War era.*

There are about 52,000 foreign-born veterans of the Korean conflict era.

There are about 52,000 surviving foreign-born veterans (currently or formerly in the armed forces) who served during the Korean War era (between June 1950 and January 1955) – about 1.7 percent of the 2.9 million surviving Korean conflict era veterans.*

There are about 66,000 foreign-born veterans of the World War II era.

There are about 66,000 surviving foreign-born veterans (currently or formerly in the armed forces) who served during the World War II era (between December 1941 and December 1946) – about 2.3 percent of the 2.9 million surviving World War II veterans.*

Due to data constraints, it is not possible to examine foreign-born veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War since a significant share remain on active duty, and thus are not counted as veterans according to our definition. Similarly, a large share of the foreign-born population that has served during the Iraq war and the coalition combat operations in Afghanistan remain on active duty.

Sources

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* This number includes those in the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard who served on active duty during this period and excludes those in the National Guard and Reserves unless they were called to active duty.

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This information was compiled by Iris Ho and Aaron Terrazas for release in November 2008. For questions or to arrange an interview with a data expert or policy analyst, please contact MPI Communications Director Michelle Mittelstadt at 202-266-1910 or mmittelstadt@migrationpolicy.org. Please visit us at www.migrationpolicy.org.

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