



PewResearchCenter

MENU

RESEARCH AREAS

JANUARY 30, 2017

Key facts about refugees to the U.S.

BY JENS MANUEL KROGSTAD ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/AUTHOR/JKROGSTAD/](http://www.pewresearch.org/author/jkrogstad/)) AND JYNNAH RADFORD ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/AUTHOR/JRADFORD/](http://www.pewresearch.org/author/jradford/))



Syrian refugees take notes during their vocational ESL class at the International Rescue Committee center in San Diego on Aug. 31, 2016. (Frederic J. Brown/AFP/Getty Images)

An executive order (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/politics/refugee-muslim-executive-order-trump.html>) signed Jan. 27 by President Donald Trump suspends refugee admissions for 120 days while security procedures are reviewed, though the resettlement of persecuted religious minorities may continue during this time on a case-by-case basis. Under the plan, the maximum number of refugees allowed into the U.S. in fiscal 2017 will likely decline from 110,000 to 50,000. Separately, admission of Syrian refugees will be suspended pending a revision of security screening measures.

About 3 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980 (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/the-refugee-act>), which created the Federal Refugee Resettlement Program and

the current national standard for the screening and admission of refugees into the country.

This is not the first time U.S. refugee admissions have been stopped. After the 2001 terrorist attacks, the U.S. largely suspended refugee resettlement for three months while security measures were examined. Today, the refugee admissions process (<https://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/admissions/>) can take up to 18 to 24 months, and includes a review of applications by the State Department and other federal agencies, in-person interviews, health screenings and, for many, cultural orientations.

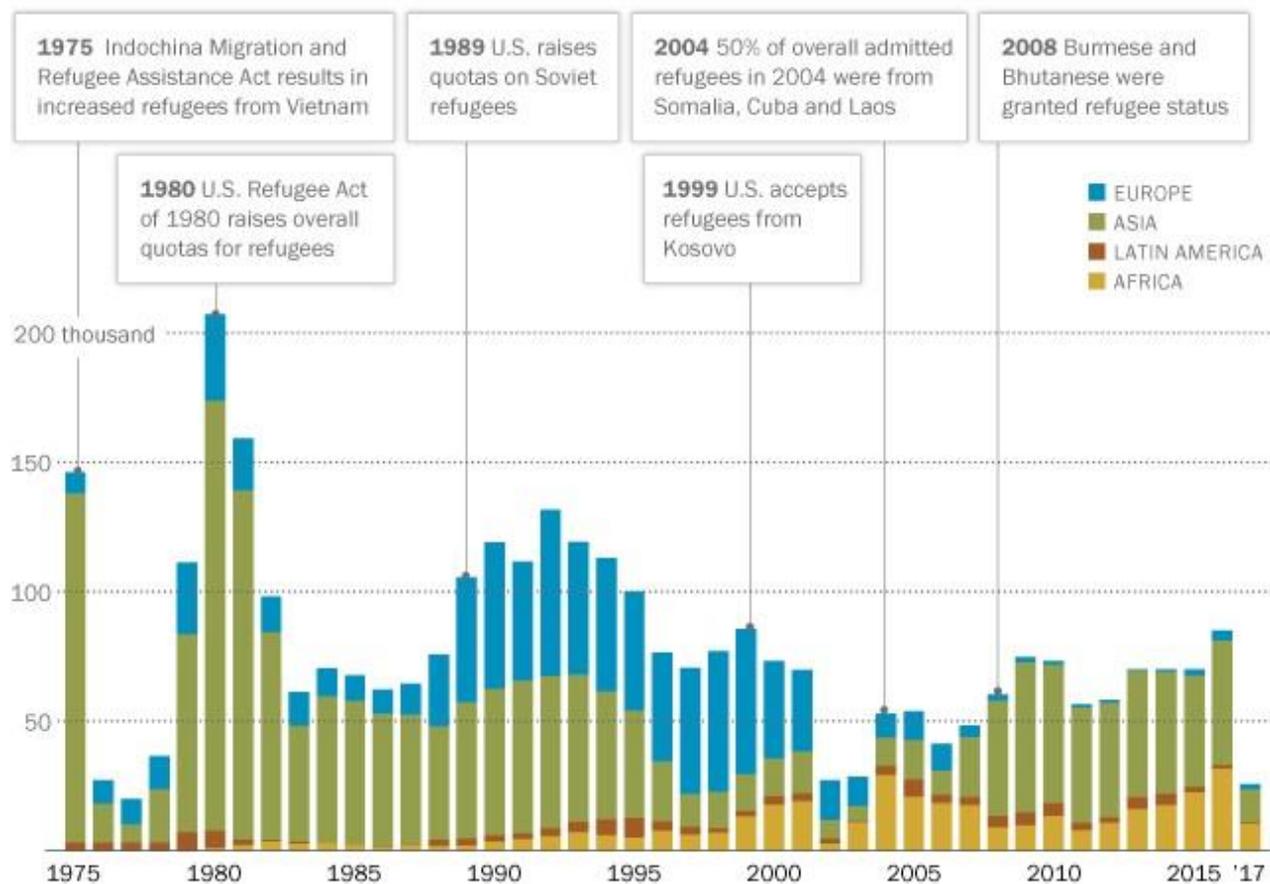
Here are key facts from our research about refugees entering the United States:

1 Historically, **the total number of refugees coming to the U.S. has fluctuated** (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/17/where-refugees-to-the-u-s-come-from/>) **along with global events and U.S. priorities.**

From 1990 to 1995, an average of about 112,000 refugees arrived in the U.S. each year, many coming from the former Soviet Union. However, refugee admissions dropped off to fewer than 27,000 in 2002 following the terrorist attacks in 2001. This number has since trended up.

The shifting origins of refugees to the U.S. over time

Number of refugees admitted to the U.S., by region of origin of principal applicant and fiscal year



Source: Refugee Processing Center, 1975-2016.

Note: Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants. Does not include refugees admitted under the Private Sector Initiative. Europe includes former Soviet Union states. Asia includes Middle Eastern and North African countries, Africa includes sub-Saharan Africa, but also Sudan and South Sudan. Latin America includes Caribbean. Data for fiscal 2017 are through Dec. 31, 2016; fiscal 2017 began Oct. 1, 2016.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2 The U.S. admitted 84,995 refugees in the fiscal year ending in September 2016, the most in any year during the Obama administration. An additional 31,143 refugees have been admitted to the U.S. from Oct. 1 through Jan. 24, including more than 1,136 refugee admissions since Trump became president on Jan. 20. Though refugee admissions would drastically drop under Trump's proposal, the U.S. had been on pace to reach the Obama administration's goal of admitting 110,000 refugees (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/20/u-s-on-track-to-reach-obama-administrations-goal-of-resettling-110000-refugees-this-year/>) in fiscal 2017, which would have been the highest number since 1994.

3 In fiscal 2016, the highest number of refugees from any nation came from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Congo accounted for 16,370 refugees followed by Syria (12,587), Burma (aka Myanmar, with 12,347), Iraq (9,880) and Somalia (9,020). Over the past decade, the largest numbers of refugees have come from Burma (159,692) and Iraq (135,643).

4 Nearly 39,000 Muslim refugees entered the U.S. in fiscal 2016, the highest number on record,

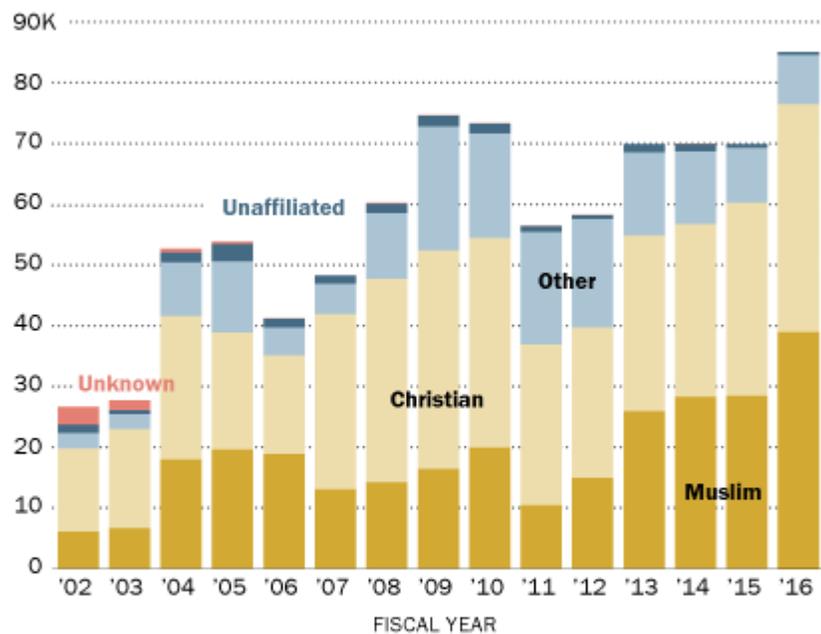
according to a Pew Research Center analysis of data from the State Department's Refugee Processing Center (<http://www.wrapsnet.org/>). Muslims made up nearly half (46%) of refugee admissions, a higher share than for Christians, who accounted for 44% of refugees admitted. Muslims exceeded Christians on this measure for the first time since 2006, when a large number of Somali refugees entered the U.S. From fiscal years 2002 to 2016, the U.S. admitted 399,677 Christian refugees and 279,339 Muslim refugees, meaning that 46% of all refugees who have entered the U.S. during this time have been Christian while 32% have been Muslim.

(<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/06/just-10-states-resettled-more-than-half-of-recent-refugees-to-u-s/>)

California, Texas and New York (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/06/just-10-states-resettled-more-than-half-of-recent-refugees-to-u-s/>) resettled nearly a quarter of all refugees in fiscal 2016, together taking 20,738 refugees. Other states that received at least 3,000 refugees included Michigan, Ohio,

U.S. admits its highest number of Muslim refugees on record in fiscal 2016

Number of refugees entering the U.S. by religious affiliation



Note: "Other religions" include Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and other religions. Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants. Fiscal years are Oct. 1 through Sept. 30 each year.

Source: U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center accessed Oct. 3, 2016.

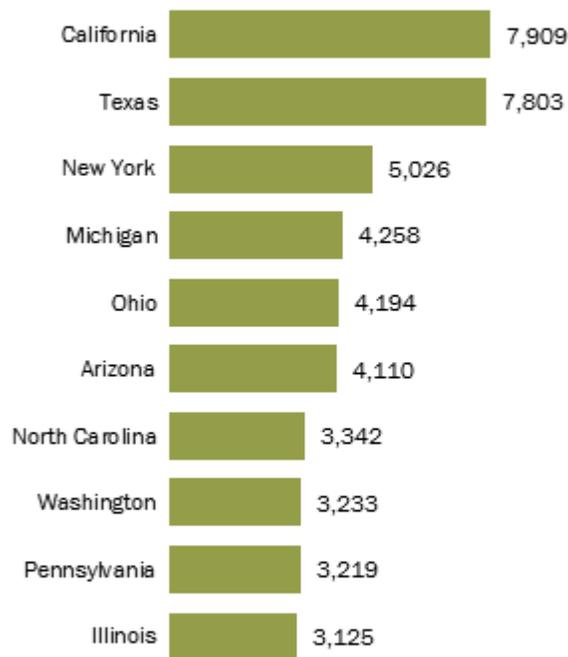
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

5 Arizona, North Carolina, Washington, Pennsylvania and Illinois. By contrast, Arkansas, the District of Columbia and Wyoming each resettled fewer than 10 refugees. Delaware and Hawaii took in no refugees.

6 **The U.S. public has seldom approved of accepting large numbers of refugees.** In October 2016, 54% of registered voters said the U.S. (<http://www.people-press.org/2016/10/27/7-opinions-on-u-s-international-involvement-free-trade-isis-and-syria-russia-and-china/>) does not have a responsibility to accept refugees from Syria, while 41% said it does. There was a wide partisan gap on this measure, with 87% of Trump supporters saying the U.S. doesn't have a responsibility to accept Syrians, compared with only 27% of Clinton supporters who said the same. U.S. public opinion polls (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/19/u-s-public-seldom-has-welcomed-refugees-into-country/>) from previous decades show Americans have largely opposed admitting large numbers of refugees from countries where people are fleeing war and oppression.

California, Texas and New York were the top states by number of refugees resettled in fiscal 2016

Number of refugees resettled in in fiscal year 2016



Note: Fiscal year began Oct. 1, 2015, and ended Sept. 30, 2016. Top 10 states by resettlement shown. Source: U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center accessed Nov 22, 2016.

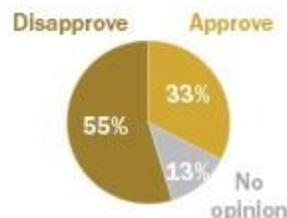
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Over the Decades, American Public Generally Hasn't Welcomed Refugees

% who say ...

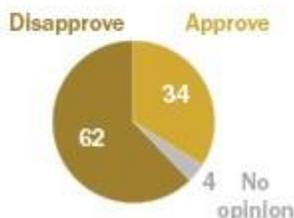
Hungarians, 1958

Would you approve or disapprove of a plan to permit 65,000 refugees who escaped the Communist regime in Hungary to come to the U.S.?



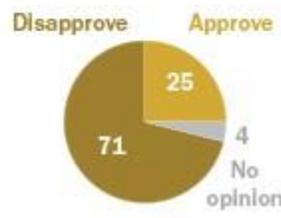
Indochinese, 1979

Do you approve or disapprove of the U.S. gov't's plan to double the number of refugees from Indochina admitted, to 14,000 a month?



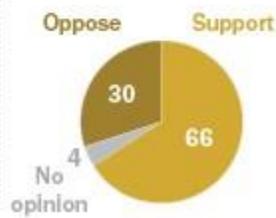
Cubans, 1980

Many refugees from Cuba have come to the U.S. recently. Do you approve or disapprove of allowing most of these Cuban refugees to settle in the U.S.?



Ethnic Albanians, 1999

Several hundred ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo have been brought to the U.S. Do you support or oppose the decision to bring them here?



Source: Gallup (Hungarians, July-August 1958; Albanians, May 1999) CBS/New York Times (Indochinese, July 1979; Cubans, June 1980)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note: This is an update of a post originally published on Jan. 27, 2017.



Jens Manuel Krogstad (<http://www.pewresearch.org/author/jkrogstad/>) is a writer/editor focusing on Hispanics, immigration and demographics at Pew Research Center.

[POSTS](#) | [EMAIL](#) | [@JENSMANUEL](#)
