



More than 606,000 people overstayed visas to remain in the country illegally in 2017 – with the largest numbers from Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela

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The Department of Homeland Security estimates that 606,926 people overstayed their visas in fiscal year 2017 to stay in the U.S. illegally – or 1.15 percent of more than 52.6 million people who were supposed to depart the country by the end of last year.

The largest proportion of those were 280,559 people (excluding Canadians and Mexicans) in the country on visas for business or pleasure, according to a new government **report**.

Among those, Brazilians had the highest proportion (31,912) of people believed to still be in the country illegally, followed by Venezuela (29,419), Colombia (21,070), **China** (16,225) and India (12,498).

Another 114,121 were here through the visa waiver program, which allows most citizens from participating countries to enter the U.S. for 90 days or less without a visa.

Visitors from the UK were the biggest offenders in that category, with 23,231 suspected of still being in the country by the end of the fiscal year. France was next with 14,406, followed by Spain (11,850) and Italy (9,043).

In addition, an estimated 93,073 of the overstays were from Canada and 47,537 were from Mexico.

The report also found 39,074 people remained in the country illegally after entering the country on a student or exchange visa by the end of FY2017. Among those, the highest proportion came from China (6,673) followed by India (2,833), Nigeria (2,172), South Korea (1,601), Brazil (1,465) and Saudi Arabia (1,445).

The overall numbers represent a slight decrease in total numbers from FY2016, when 628,799 people overstayed, representing 1.25 percent of the 50.4 million who were supposed to depart the country that year.

The past two years have seen an increase compared to FY2015, when just 482,781 people overstayed, or 1.07 percent of the 44.9 million people to who were legally supposed to leave the country.

Interpretation of the numbers varies depending on ideology, with some experts viewing the rate of over-stayers - 1.15 percent - as a systemic success.

'This is a pretty small issue and the number of people who entered the U.S. legally and overstayed and were supposed to leave in 2017 was very small,' said Alex Nowrasteh, senior immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

'It should make Americans realize that our immigration laws are much better enforced than most people realize,' Nowrasteh added. 'We focus on the illegal immigrant population in the United States, but there are many assets in our immigration system where there is a high degree of enforcement that is improving.'

However immigration opponents said that the overall numbers are still too high and could pose threats to American jobs and national security.

'It's a startlingly large number of people who see no problem staying past the time authorized on their visa, they feel no risk of enforcement or consequences,' said Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies at the anti-immigration Center for Immigration Studies.

She noted that the number of people who overstayed on business or pleasure visas increased by about 17,000 people year-over-year in 2017, which she said is significant because it's the category with the highest proportion of over stayers.

'If a huge share of the people who get the visas are not complying with them we shouldn't be issuing so many in the first place,' Vaughan said.

The government is using a new 'multifaceted approach' to deal with the issue of overstays that includes methods to better track people here on visas and remind them when it's nearly time to leave, Department of Homeland Security officials said in the report.

Those efforts include: Improving entry and exit data collection and reporting; notifying visitors when their visa time is almost up; cancelling travel authorizations and visas for violators; recurrent vetting of many of these visitors; and apprehending these so-called 'overstays' who are still present in the U.S.