

Race and Ethnicity

# ***What happened to US immigration and the foreign-born population during the pandemic***

**Jeffrey S. Passel**

*Senior Demographer*

***3<sup>rd</sup> International Forum on Migration Statistics***

Parallel Session F.3:

Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on data on migrants and migration

Santiago, Chile — 26 January 2023

# Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. **We do not take policy positions.**

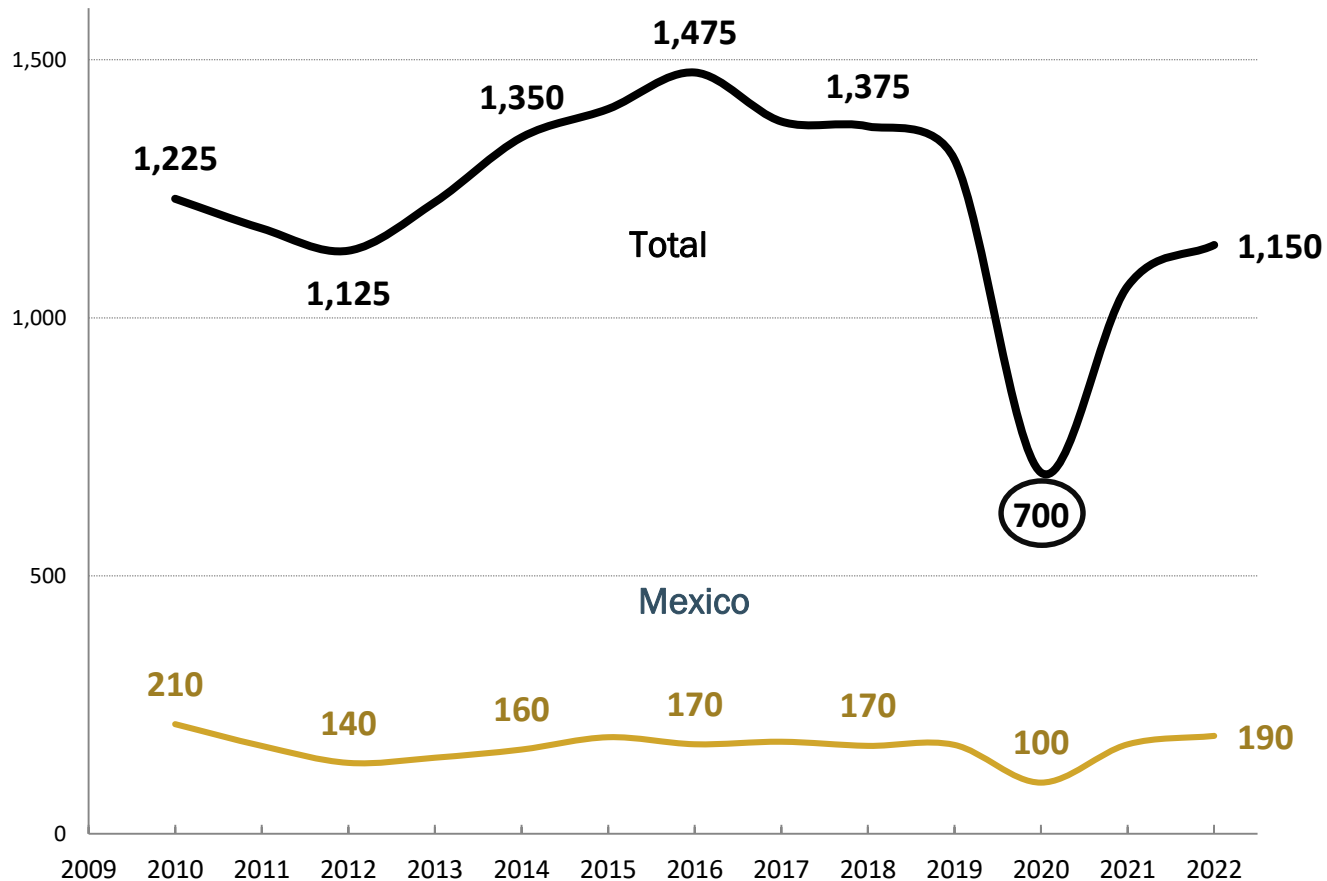
We are a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, our primary funder.

# Today's presentation

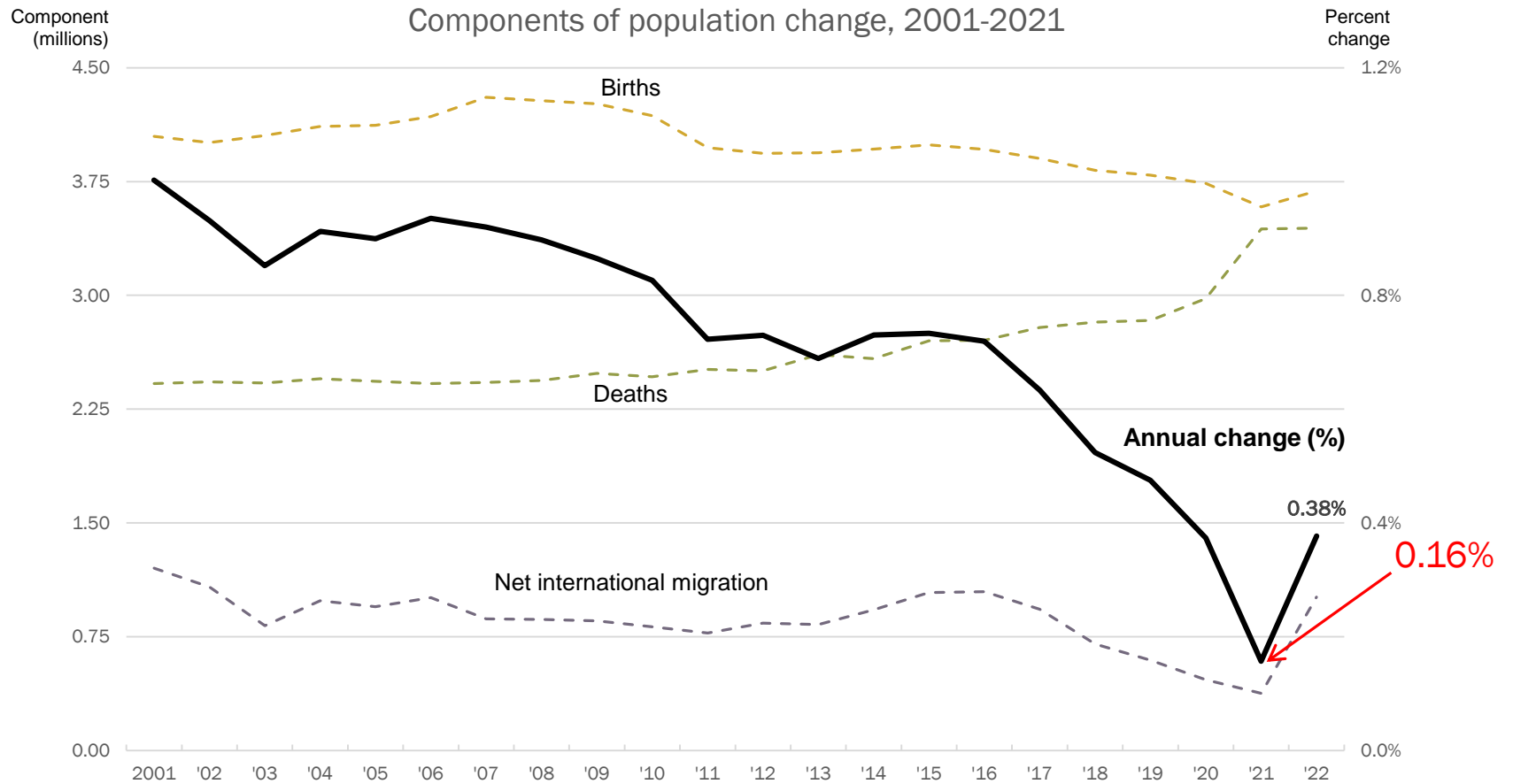
- **Immigration flows to the US dropped dramatically in 2020**
  - Flows are way down from historical levels
  - Recent data (OIS) show some upticks but still low ('21)
  - Data from last several months of '22 point to increases

# Estimated inflows from survey data show large drop in 2020

Estimated annual immigration inflows to the U.S.,  
Total and from Mexico (in thousands)



# Slowest growth in US history for '20-'21



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2009, 2019 and 2022 population estimates with Pew Research Center modifications.

# Today's presentation

- **Immigration flows to the US dropped dramatically in 2020**
  - Flows are way down from historical levels
  - Recent data (OIS) show some upticks but still low ('21)
  - Data from last several months of '22 point to increases
- **Main data sources seriously compromised in 2020**
  - *Legal admissions* data are fine (from Office of Immigration Statistics or **OIS**)
  - *Current Population Survey (CPS* -- labor force survey)
  - Monthly survey not usable for Mar.-Sep. '20 & maybe into '21
  - March supplement compromised for '20 and '21
  - *American Community Survey (ACS)* not usable for '20 but '21 is ok
  - **Detailed 2020 census results not in current data**
- **How many immigrants live in the US?**
  - Little growth in last 2 years → leveled off at 46-47+ million
  - Late '22 monthly data (Sep-Nov) suggest higher numbers
- **How many *unauthorized immigrants* live in the US**
  - New Pew estimates for '18-'19 → little change at ~ 10 million
  - '20-'21 ACS data show virtually no change
  - Monthly CPS from late '22 and border apprehensions imply possible growth

# ***Lawful Immigrants (OIS, DHS)***

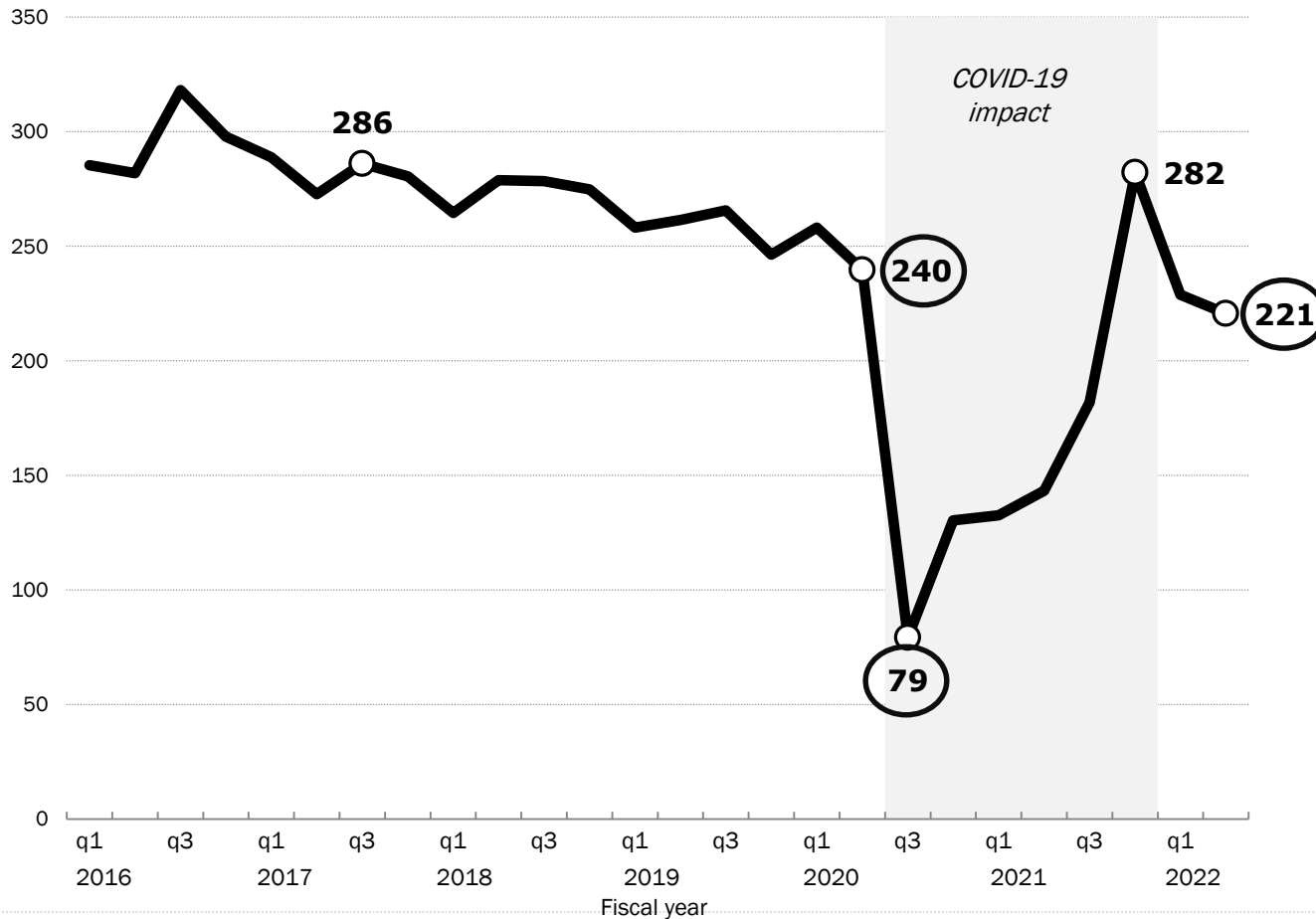
# Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS in DHS)

- **Release quarterly statistics with minimal lag**
  - a. Trump administration innovation
  - b. Green cards (LPR admissions)
  - c. Refugee arrivals
  - d. Naturalizations
  - e. Nonimmigrant arrivals (lag one quarter)
- ***Inflows way down from 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter FY20 (Apr '20)***
  - a. “New arrival” green cards, refugees
  - b. Legal temporary admissions (I-94)
- ***Some recovery by 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter FY22 (Mar '22)***
  - a. Green cards almost to pre-pandemic levels
  - b. Naturalizations trending above pre-pandemic levels
  - c. Legal temporary up but most at 50% of earlier inflows



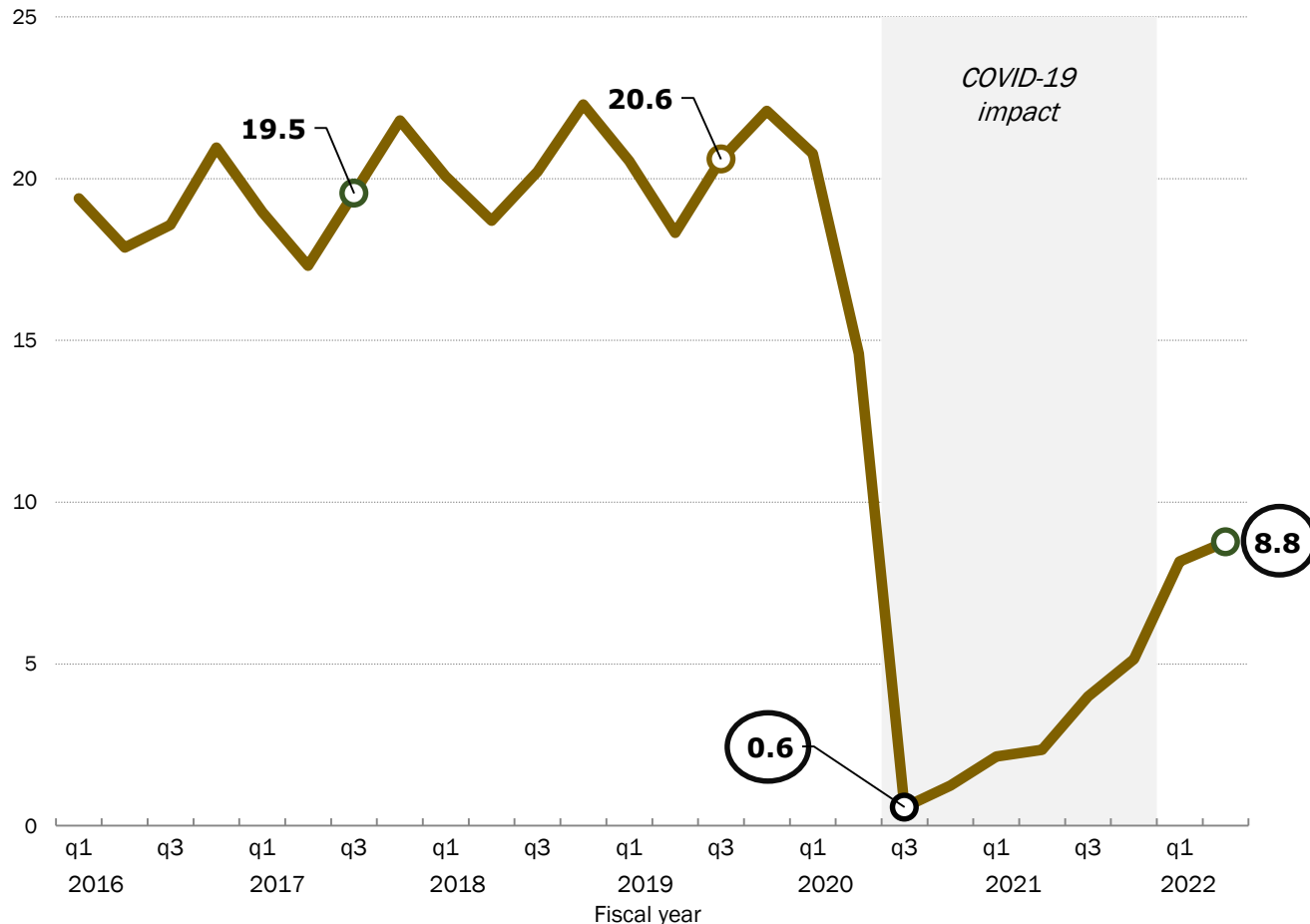
# ***Total green cards granted*** fell almost 75% ***FY22 is “low” but back to pre-pandemic levels***

(quarterly, in thousands)



# ***Temporary visas*** (major source of unauthorized) cratered initially (-97%), still 50% below normal

(quarterly, in millions)

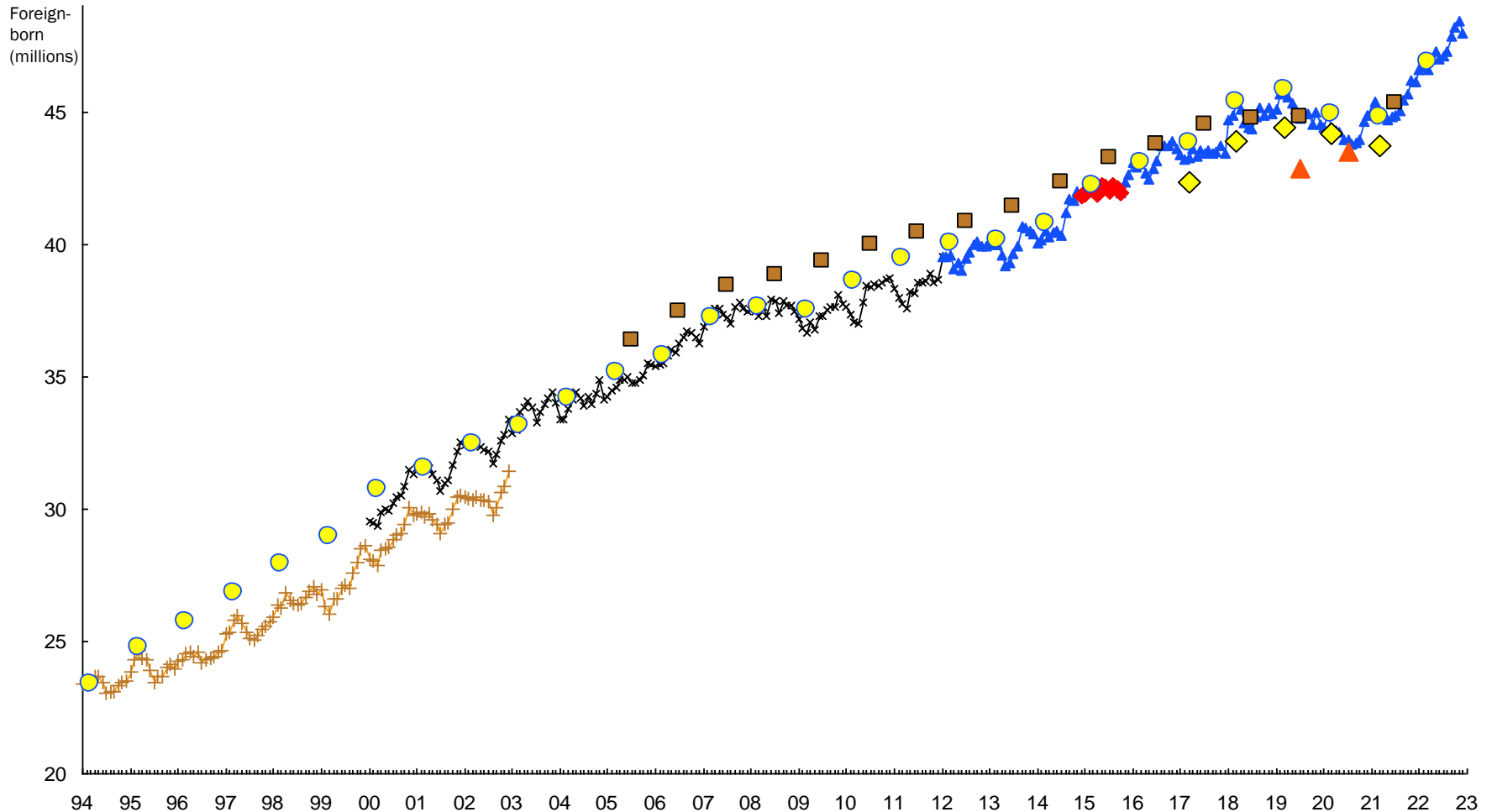


# ***Immigrant Population in the US***

# Population data sources

- **Two (or three) major surveys**
  - American Community Survey (ACS) – 1% random sample (>1M HHs)
    - “Rolling” sample collected over 12 months
  - Monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) – 40K HHs
    - Overlapping, state-based design with clustering
  - March CPS ASEC – 60K HHs (oversamples for children & minorities)
- **Timing varies considerably**
  - Monthly CPS – month after data collection (timely!! but small sample)
  - March CPS – September of collection year
  - ACS – fall of year *after* reference date and data collection
- **Weighting determines size of immigrant population**
  - Weights assigned to agree with census-based population estimates
  - Weights use age, sex, race/Hispanic and geography mainly
  - **None of the surveys use nativity in the weighting (!)**
  - CPS uses short-term projections made before data collection
  - **Current data *DOES NOT* use full 2020 Census results**

# Alternative estimates of foreign-born *“All over the place” – Inconsistent recently (“18+)*



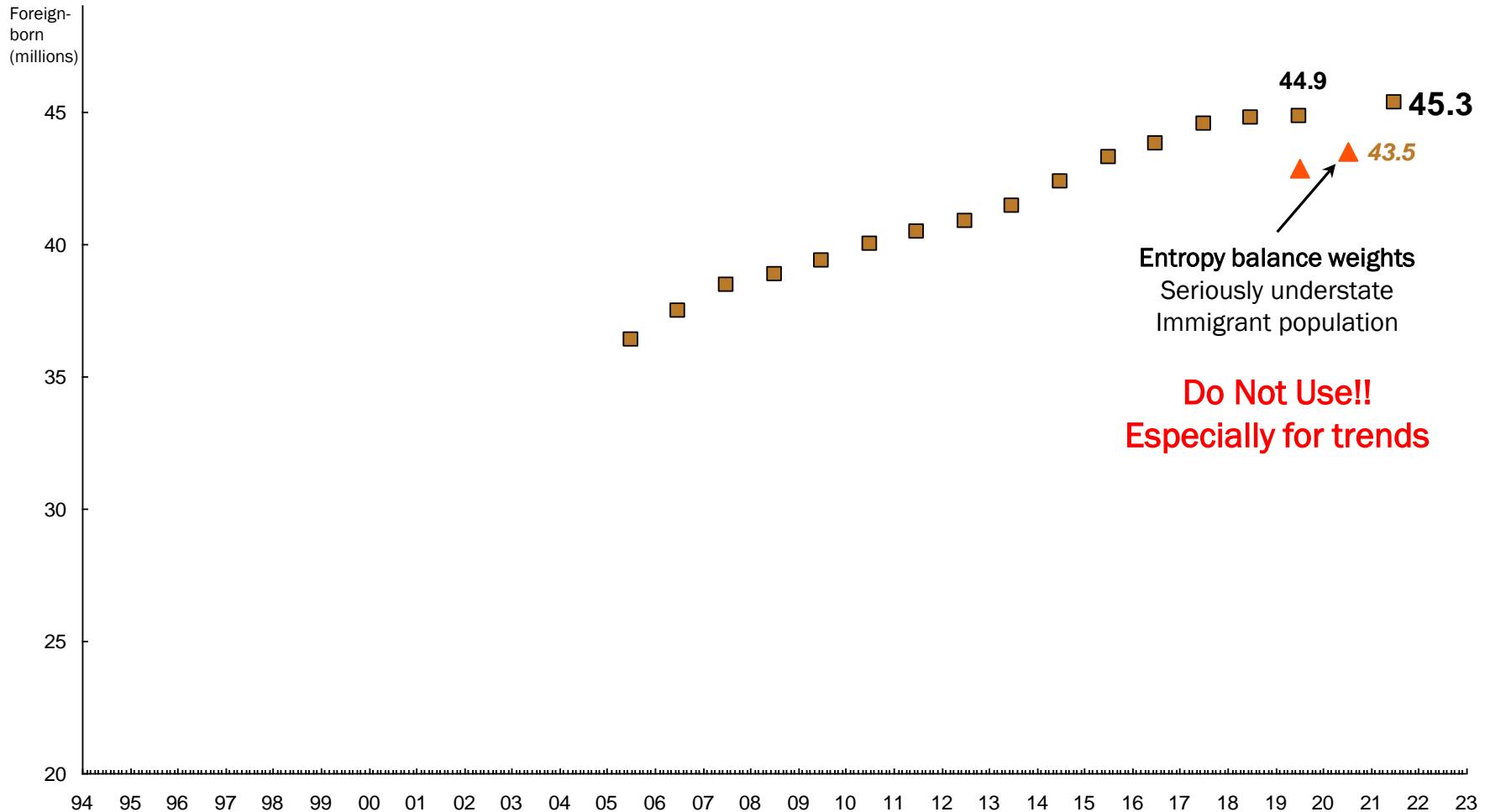
Source: Pew Research and Census Bureau alternative weights for many years, especially in the ;90s and '00s.  
Contact author for more information.

# Pandemic challenges

- **In-person data collection stopped in mid-March 2020**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> CPS monthly interviews are supposed to be in-person
- **Mailing of materials was also halted**
  - Census Mail Center (Jeffersonville, IN) closed in March 2020 for 6 months
  - Follow-ups were limited to telephone (and on-line)
  - At least *6 months* of ACS & CPS data was severely compromised
- **Non-response rates skyrocketed**
  - Immigrants have higher non-response rates; more likely to need in-person interviews
  - Immigrants are underrepresented in the samples (and in follow-ups)
  - Regular weighting does not compensate
- **Alternative weighting (Entropy Balance) applied to ASEC & ACS**
  - Designed to “correct” over-reporting on income (and underreporting of poverty)
  - Incorporates administrative records into the weighting
  - Does not always use full weighting scheme
- **Consistently LOWER immigrant populations with EB weights**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> applied to March ‘20 ASEC; then March ‘21 ASEC and finally ‘20 ACS
  - For trending, EB weights for ‘17-’19 ASEC and ‘19 ACS
  - Monthly response patterns seem to have almost returned to normal

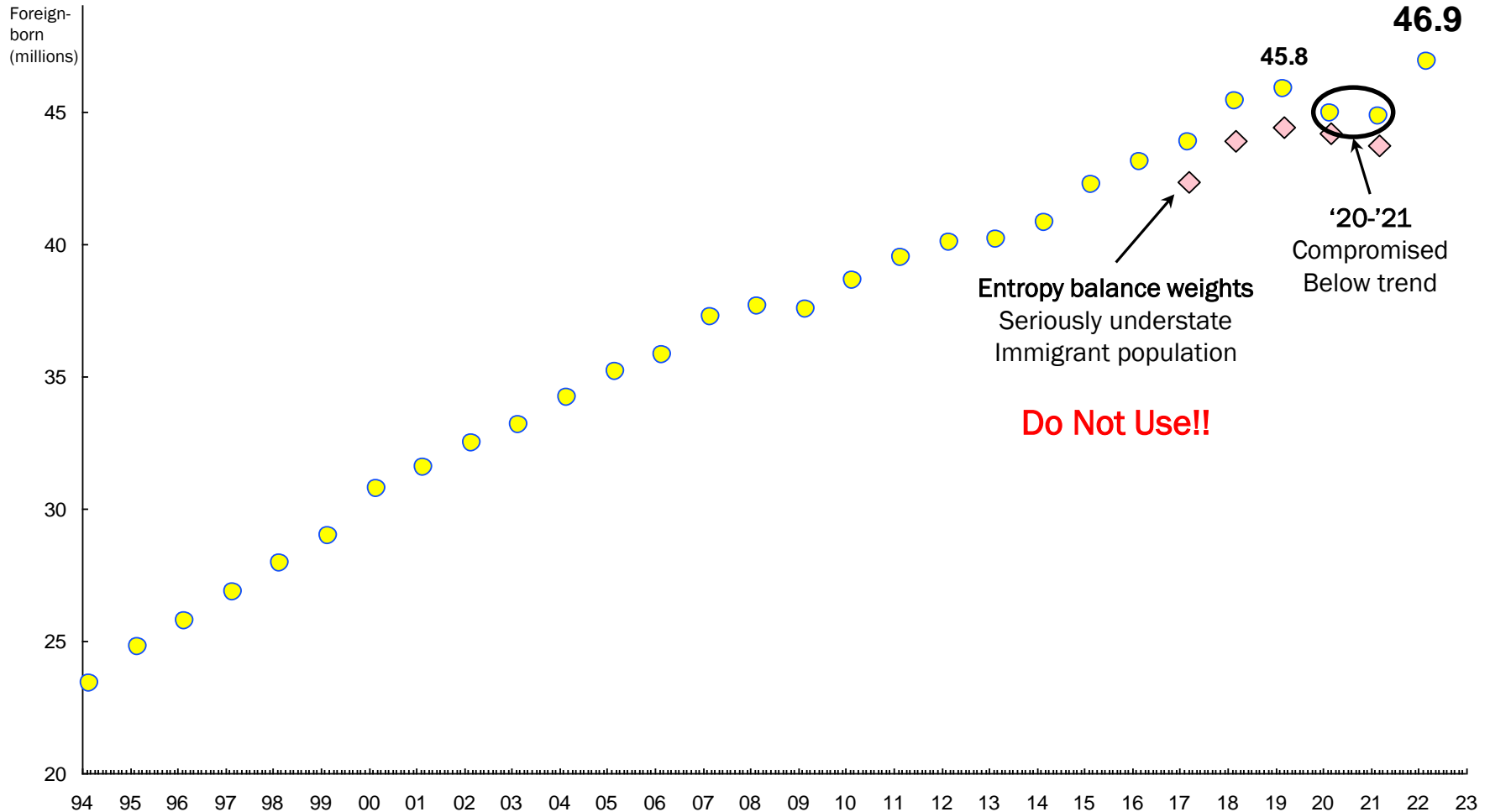
# ACS shows leveling in 2022

## *Alternative weights for '20 (& '19) not usable*



Source: Pew Research and Census Bureau alternative weights for many years, especially in the ;90s and '00s.  
Contact author for more information.

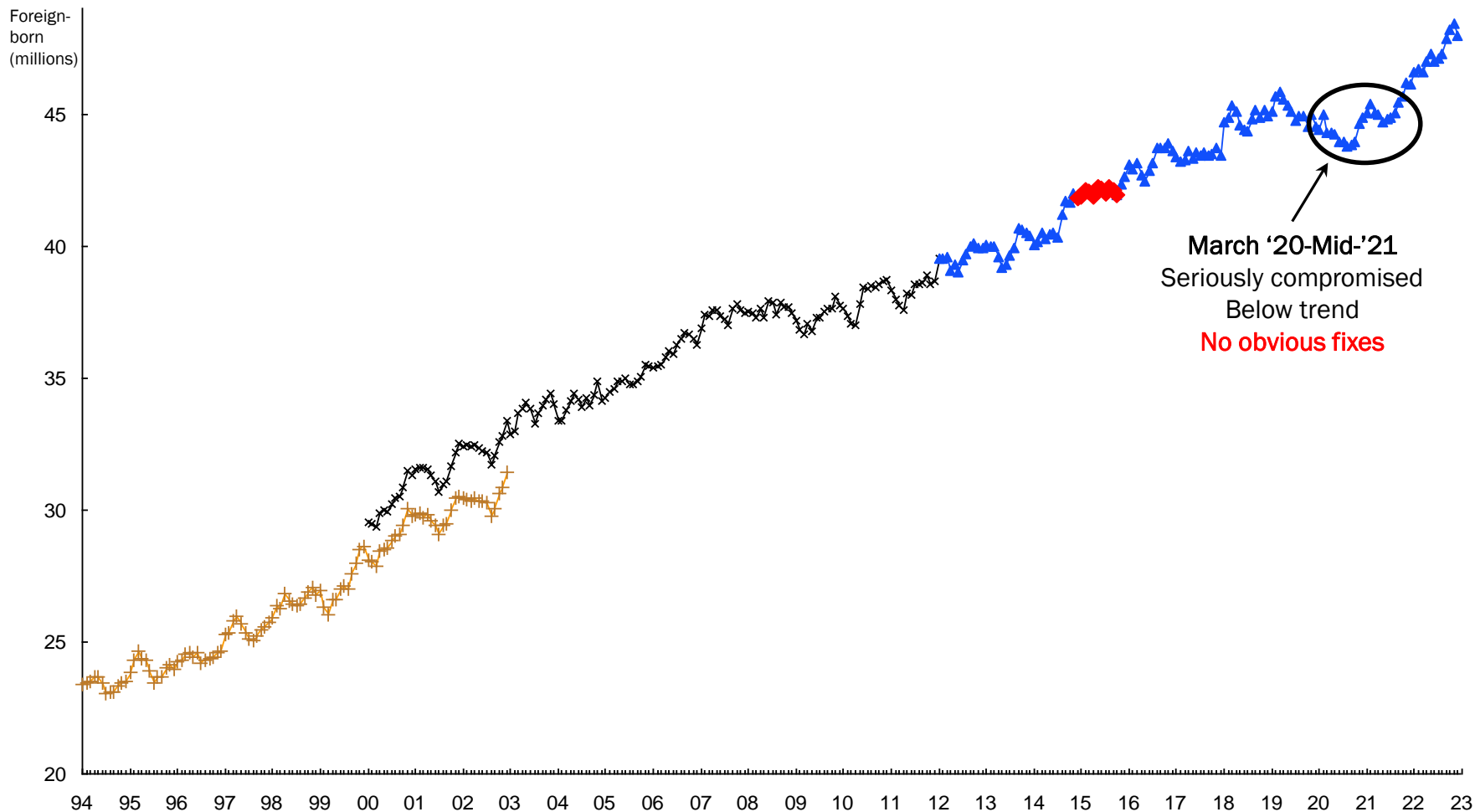
# ASEC (March CPS) levels off, but higher '20 & '21 inadequate – Alternative weights not usable



Source: Pew Research and Census Bureau alternative weights for many years, especially in the '90s and '00s.  
Contact author for more information.



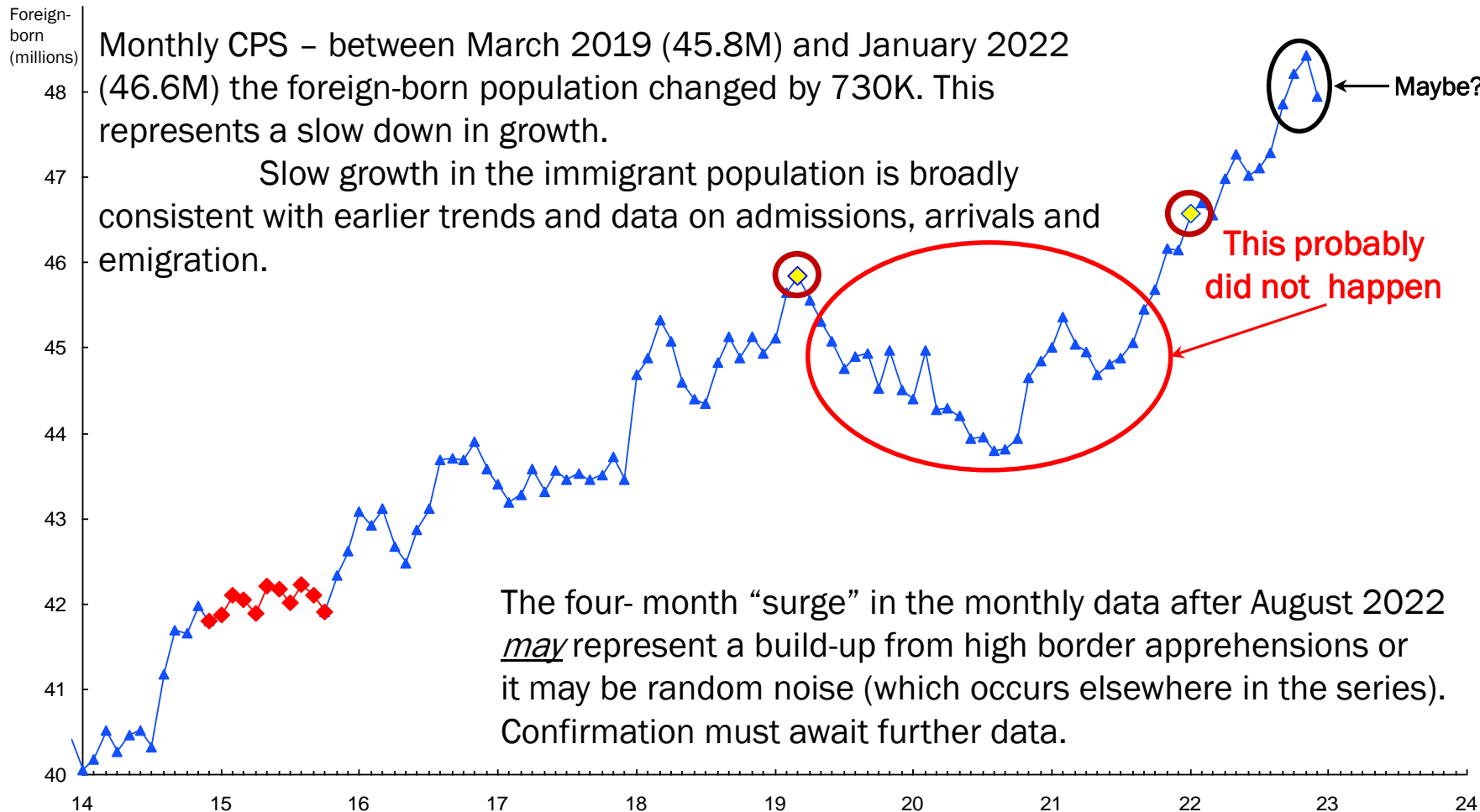
**Monthly CPS (normally variable) is now more so**  
***Mar. '20 thru '21 is severely compromised***  
***Because of the operational problems, there is no obvious fix***



Source: Pew Research and Census Bureau alternative weights for many years, especially in the '90s and '00s.  
Contact author for more information.

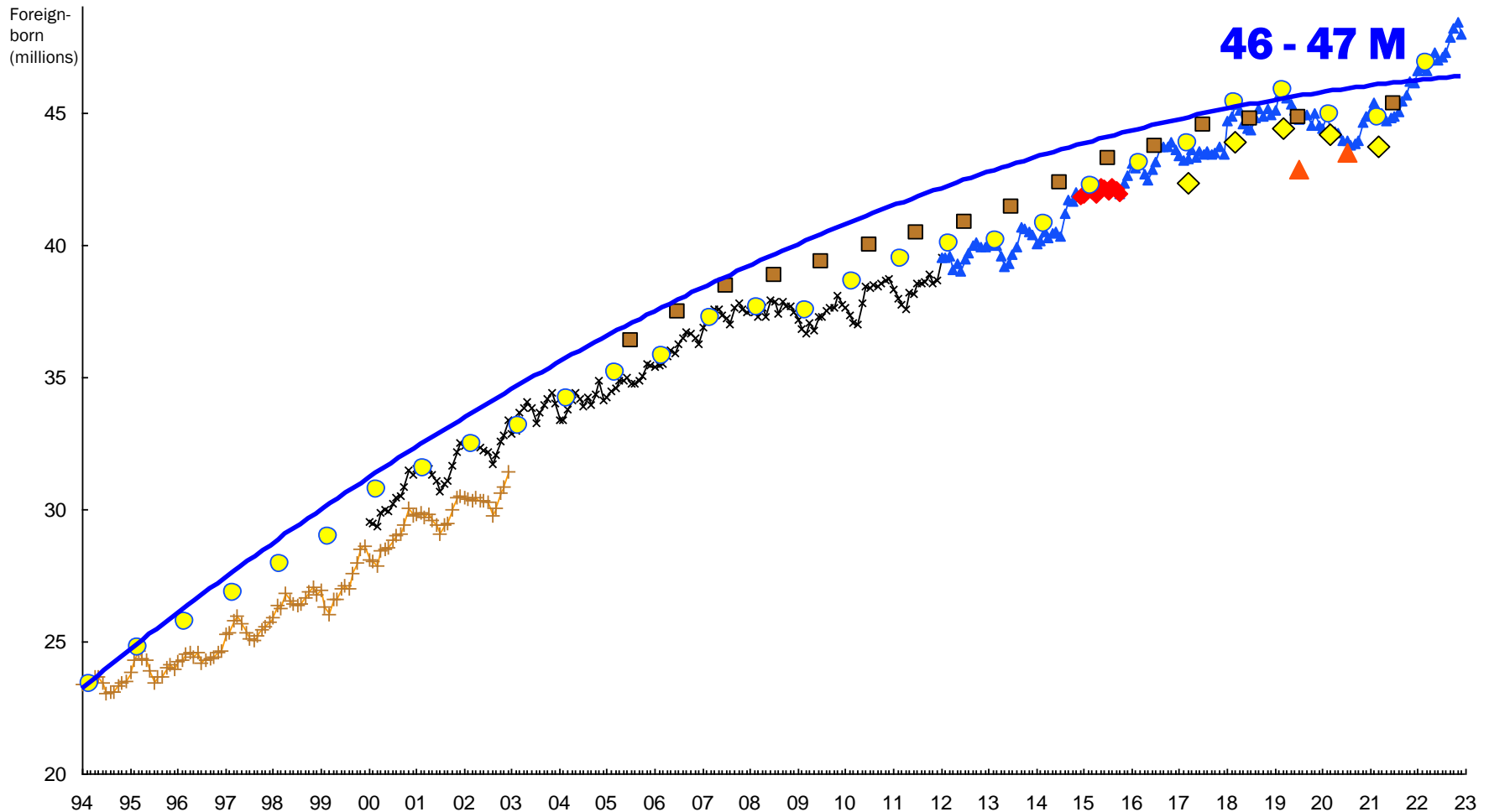
# Monthly CPS thru August 2022 implies slow growth

## *The apparent growth in Sep.-Dec. 2022 will need confirmation from 2023 data*



# Rough trend of foreign-born population

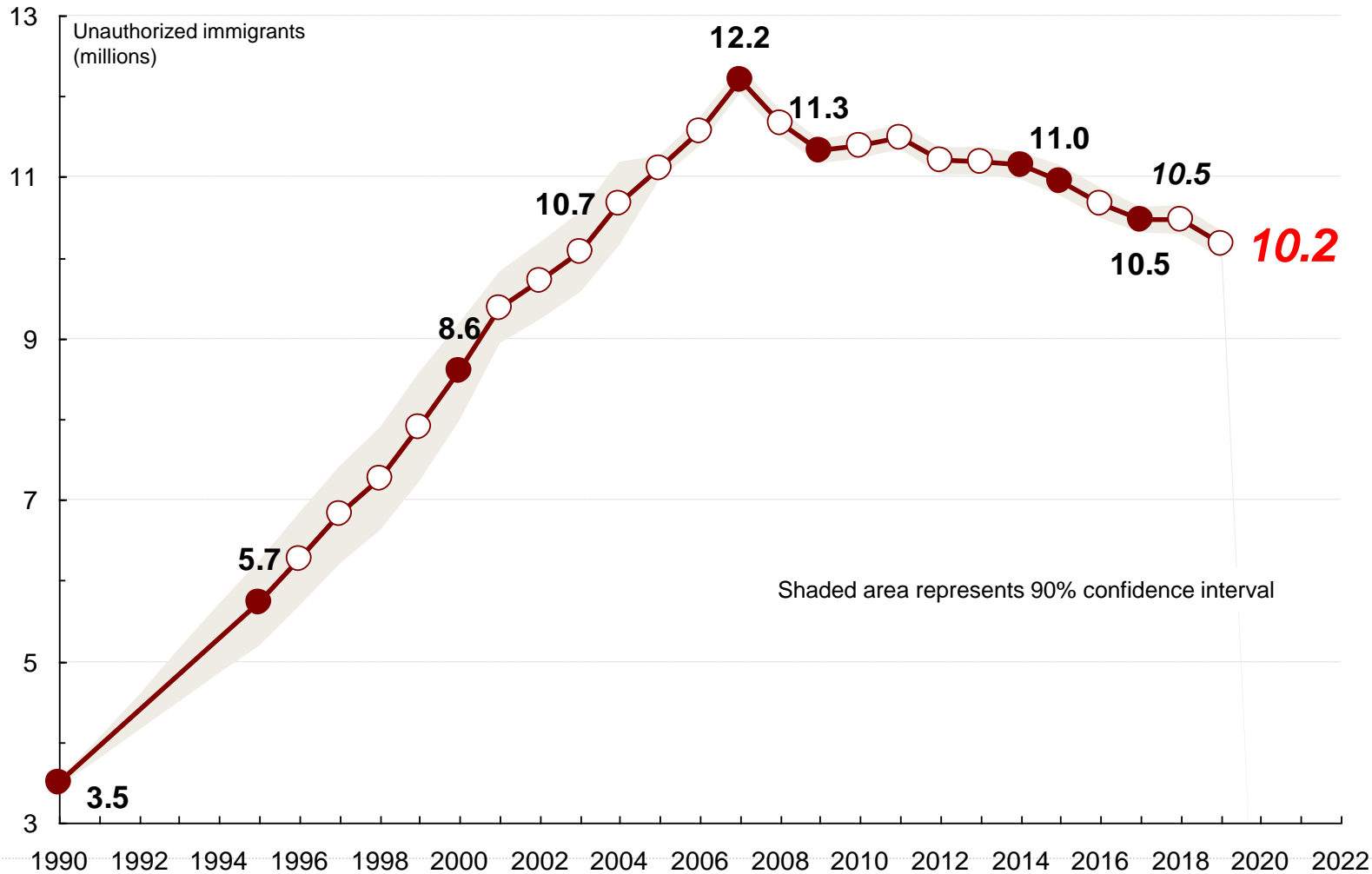
*Discounting '20-'21 data → trending to 46+ million*



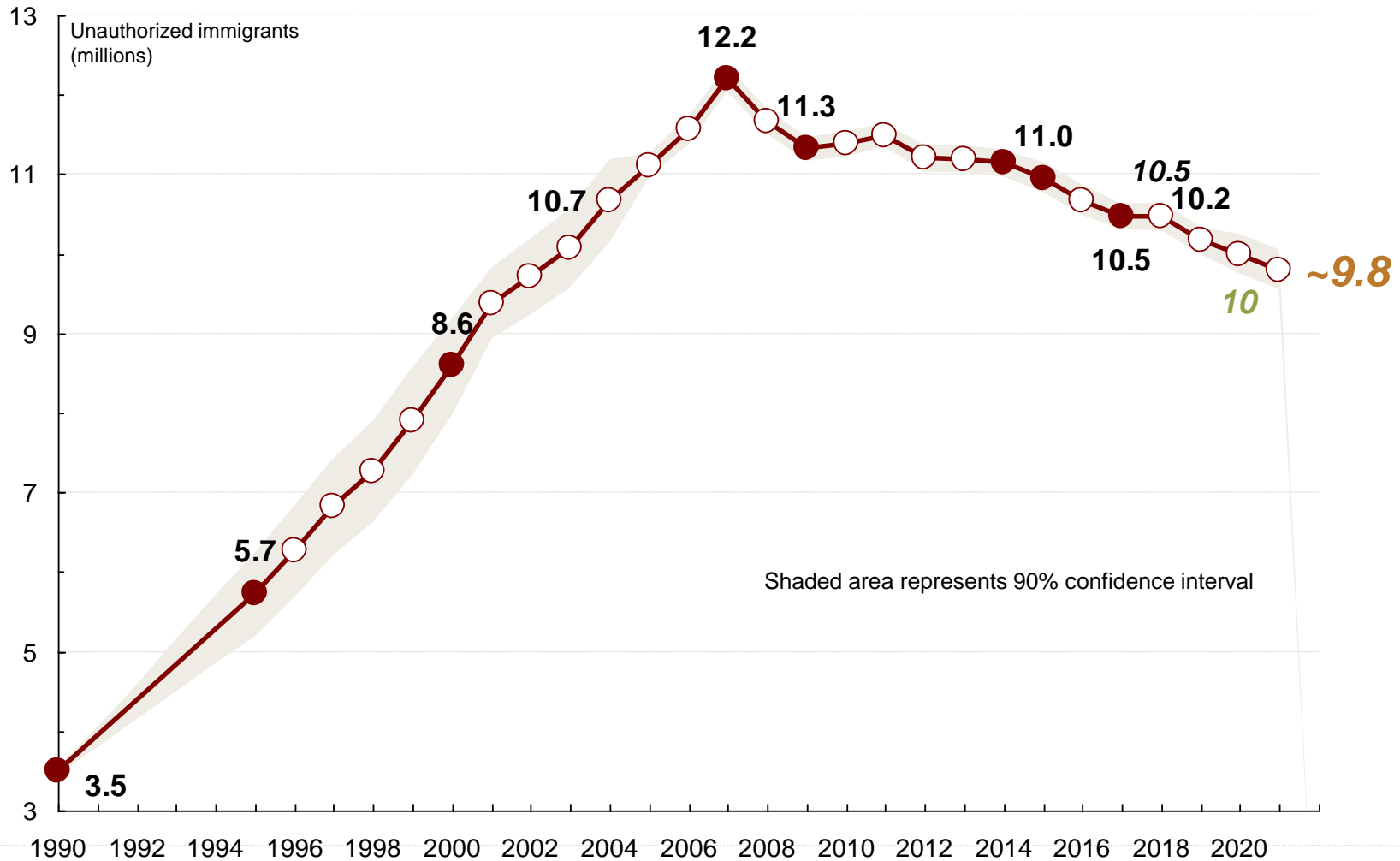
Source: Pew Research and Census Bureau alternative weights for many years, especially in the 1990s and 2000s.  
Contact author for more information.

***What about  
unauthorized immigrants?***

# Pew estimates show large decline after '07, Slow decline to '15, then to '17 at 10+ million



# 2020-21 figures is *unlikely* to go up – Preliminary estimates point to 10 million or less



# Conclusions

- **Survey data sources for immigration flows, pop. size & characteristics are seriously compromised for '20 and for some sources into '21**
- Immigration inflows plunged in '20
- **Inflows increased by '22 but have remained somewhat below pre-pandemic levels**
- Immigrant population growth slowed through mid-'22
- **Unauthorized population numbers dropped very slightly through '21 since '17**
- Monthly data from last 4 months of 2022 may imply possible increases in immigration inflows

***Thank you!***



# Contact Information

**Jeffrey S. Passel**

*Senior Demographer*

[jpassel@pewresearch.org](mailto:jpassel@pewresearch.org)

202-419-3625 (direct)

202-527-2146 (mobile, preferred)

Race and Ethnicity