



Take-Up Rates for Driver's Licenses

When Unauthorized Immigrants Can Get a License, How Many Do?

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January 31, 2017. Currently 12 states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico allow residents to apply for driver's licenses irrespective of their immigration status. That gives us a substantial basis for answering the question: When the barrier is removed that prevents unauthorized immigrants from getting a license, how many of them do so?

By the third year of having the law in place, between a quarter and a half of unauthorized immigrants over the age of 16 have received a license, according to an analysis of data obtained by the Fiscal Policy Institute from five states and Washington DC.

For other states considering changes in their driver's license policies, it seems reasonable to assume that within three years they would be in approximately this range, and in the long run toward the top of the range. Some variation in the rate might be expected based on factors such as outreach strategies, political climate, and the availability of public transportation.

Analysis

In the first full year of implementation, between 12 percent and 25 percent of age-eligible undocumented immigrants received driver's licenses in all five of the states for which annual data are available. (Note that the first bar in the chart for Washington, D.C. and Illinois reflect less than a full year of implementation. In Colorado, the figure for 2015 includes some licenses issued in 2014.)

By the second full year of implementation, in three of the five areas the rate was one third or higher (34 percent in California, 36 percent in D.C., and 40 percent in Illinois). Nevada and Colorado are the outliers here, with a second-year take-up rate of 22 percent and 19 percent respectively.

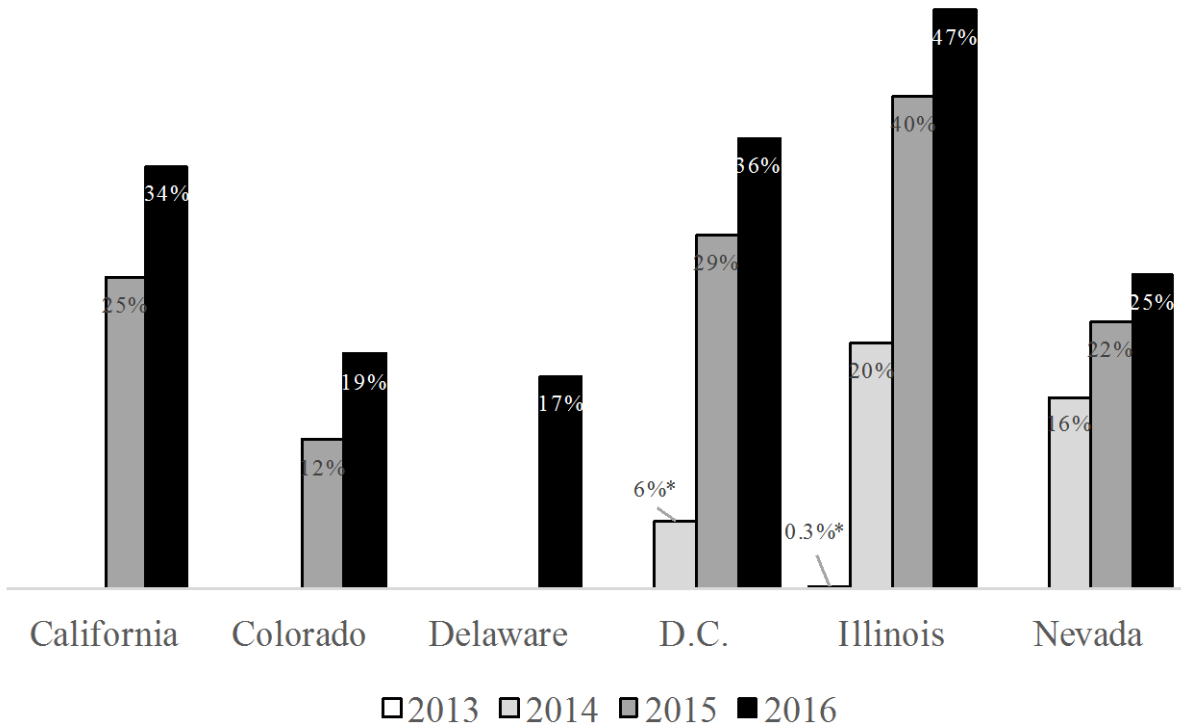
Only two areas for which data are available have had the program in place for three full years— Illinois, which reached 47 percent of the age-eligible population by 2016, and Nevada, which had low take-up rates in all years, and reached 25 percent of the age-eligible population by 2016.

It is worth noting that the availability of good public transportation alternatives very likely decreases the number of unauthorized immigrants who get driver's licenses when they are available. This clearly reduces the take-up rate for Washington, D.C., and to a lesser degree also for Illinois because of the availability of public transportation in Chicago, where many of the state's undocumented immigrants are concentrated.

The share of undocumented immigrants in Colorado getting licenses is likely smaller than in other states due to continued conflict around the program, including limits on the number of offices and how many customers these offices can serve, as a practical matter.

What Share of Unauthorized Immigrants Are Issued Driver's Licenses When They Are Permitted to Apply?

Data available for five states and D.C.



Data Sources

Fourteen areas currently allow unauthorized immigrants to apply for a driver's license—the states of California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Vermont, Washington, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

In six cases the Fiscal Policy Institute was able to obtain data about how many licenses were issued to unauthorized immigrants: California, Colorado, Delaware, D.C., Illinois, and Nevada. These licenses, alternatively called Driving Privilege Cards, Temporary Visitor Driver Licenses, AB 60 licenses, or Driver Authorization Cards—represent the number of unauthorized immigrants who have gotten licenses in each area. Driver's licenses and permits are both included in the calculations; non-driving ID cards are not included.

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Estimates of the number of unauthorized immigrants 16 years and older in each state and in the District of Columbia were obtained from the Center for Migration Studies (CMS).¹ The CMS data were estimates for the population in 2014; this same figure was used as the denominator for all years calculated.

The data on the number of AB 60 licenses issued in California was obtained from two sources. For the year of 2015, the numbers were available to the public on the State of California Department of Motor Vehicles website where they were published in an article titled "[AB 60: 605,000 Driver Licenses Issued in First Year](#)." The most recent cumulative total, which covers the period until December 2016, was obtained from "[AB 60 Monthly Statistics](#)," provided to the Fiscal Policy Institute by the California Department of Motor Vehicles.

For Delaware, data on Driving Privilege cards was provided to the Fiscal Policy Institute in response to a Freedom of Information Act request. The data can be viewed [here](#).

For Colorado, the data on licenses issued was obtained from the "[Staff Budget Briefing: FY 2017-2018](#)" provided to the Fiscal Policy Institute by Colorado Joint Budget Committee.

For Illinois, the data on the number of Temporary Visitor Driver Licenses was provided to the Fiscal Policy Institute directly by the secretary of state official who oversees the program.

For Nevada, the number of Driver Authorization Cards was provided to the Fiscal Policy Institute by the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles. The data can be accessed [here](#).

And, for the District of Columbia, the number of Limited Purpose driver licenses were obtained from the public report [FY 15/16 Performance Oversight Questions](#).

¹ The state tool, available at data.cmsny.org, includes in the data about labor force an estimate for the total number of unauthorized immigrants in each area who are 16 and older. CMS data refer to those based on the 2014 American Community Survey, so the denominator of the calculations stays the same, only the numerator (the number of licenses issued) changes.