

The State of Immigrant New York

New York City is a city of immigrants: nearly half of Queens residents (47%) are foreign born, and even Staten Island—the borough with the smallest share of immigrants—boasts a population that is 21% foreign born. Given the size of New York City’s foreign-born population, and its significance for the economic success and cultural vitality of the City, this year’s *State of the City* takes a deeper look at this population.

We ask three questions in particular:

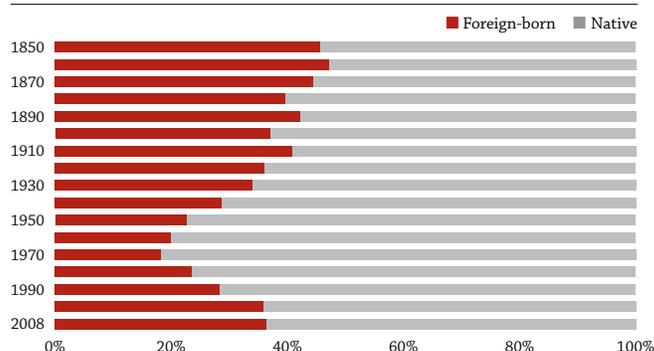
- How has the size and composition of the City’s immigrant population changed over the last century?
- How do the socioeconomic characteristics of foreign-born New Yorkers compare to those of native-born households in New York? How do they compare to the characteristics of immigrants in other large cities and around the country?
- Where do immigrants tend to settle in the City, and what are the characteristics of those neighborhoods?

TRENDS IN NEW YORK CITY IMMIGRATION

In 2008, 36% of the New York City population was born outside the U.S. This is almost exactly the same share of the population that was foreign born in 1900. Over the past century, the share of immigrants has fluctuated a great deal, dropping to 18% in 1970 before climbing back to the current level (see Figure 1).

Immigrants make up a much larger share of New York City’s population than they do of the national population (12%), but other cities have larger immigrant

Figure 1: Foreign-born Share of Population in New York City, 1850–2008



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey (2008)

shares (see Table 1).¹ For example, 58% of Miami’s population and 39% of Los Angeles’s population are foreign born. Unlike the immigrant populations in other cities, however, New York City’s more than 3 million immigrants come from all over the globe: 24% are from Central² and South America; 27% are from the Caribbean; 26% are from Asia; about 17% are from Europe; and

¹ To compare New York City to other cities, we selected the ten cities that had the greatest number of foreign-born residents in 2008.

² The Census includes Mexico in Central America.

Table 1: New York Compared to Other U.S. Cities with Large Foreign-born Populations

	Population	Foreign-born Share	Poverty Rate (native-born)	Poverty Rate (foreign-born)	Educational Attainment: No High School Diploma (native-born)	Educational Attainment: No High School Diploma (foreign-born)
Chicago	2,741,455	21.4%	21.4%	17.7%	15.3%	37.8%
Dallas	1,227,082	26.6%	21.4%	25.8%	14.1%	62.0%
Houston	2,023,601	28.4%	19.0%	20.9%	13.9%	47.9%
Los Angeles	3,803,383	39.4%	18.3%	21.0%	9.8%	42.9%
Miami	343,142	57.5%	24.3%	26.5%	19.7%	39.0%
New York	8,363,710	36.4%	18.8%	17.3%	14.4%	30.0%
Phoenix	1,525,257	23.3%	16.3%	27.5%	10.6%	52.2%
San Diego	1,266,963	25.2%	14.0%	15.7%	6.4%	30.7%
San Francisco	808,976	35.0%	10.7%	11.6%	5.1%	31.1%
San Jose	916,715	38.1%	8.6%	9.4%	9.5%	27.9%
United States	304,059,728	12.5%	12.8%	16.0%	11.7%	32.5%

Source: American Community Survey (2008)

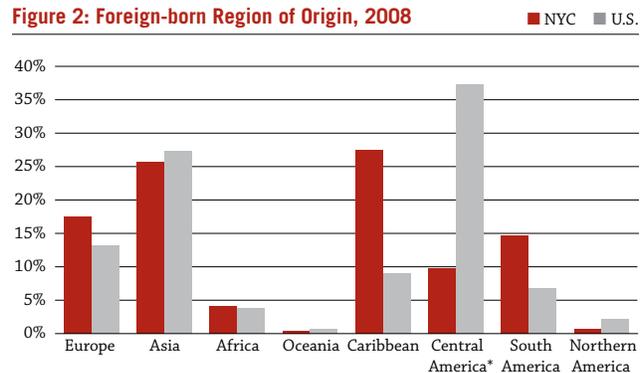
about 4% are from Africa. Figure 2, which compares the composition of the immigrant population in New York City to that of the immigrant population nationwide, shows that New York City's foreign-born population draws much more heavily from the Caribbean and South America, and much less from Central America than for the nation as a whole.

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF IMMIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS

In 2008, the median income for a foreign-born New York household³ was \$40,000, while the median income for a native-born household in New York was \$52,000. As Table 2 shows, this gap is similar to the gap between median household income for foreign-born and native-born households in the country as a whole (\$41,300 and \$51,000, respectively). This gap narrows significantly in some of the boroughs, and actually reverses in the Bronx, where the foreign-born population has a higher median income than the native-born population (\$33,000 and \$31,000, respectively). Manhattan is the borough with the widest income gap between foreign-born and native-born residents (\$45,000 and \$75,000, respectively).

3 In this analysis, we defined foreign-born households as those households where all the adults are foreign born. For comparison, we defined native-born households as those households where all adults are native-born. We excluded from this analysis any households that had both foreign-born and native-born adults. Under our definition, in 2008, 53% of New York City households were native born, 35% were foreign born and the remaining 12% were mixed.

Figure 2: Foreign-born Region of Origin, 2008



*Includes Mexico. Source: American Community Survey (2008)

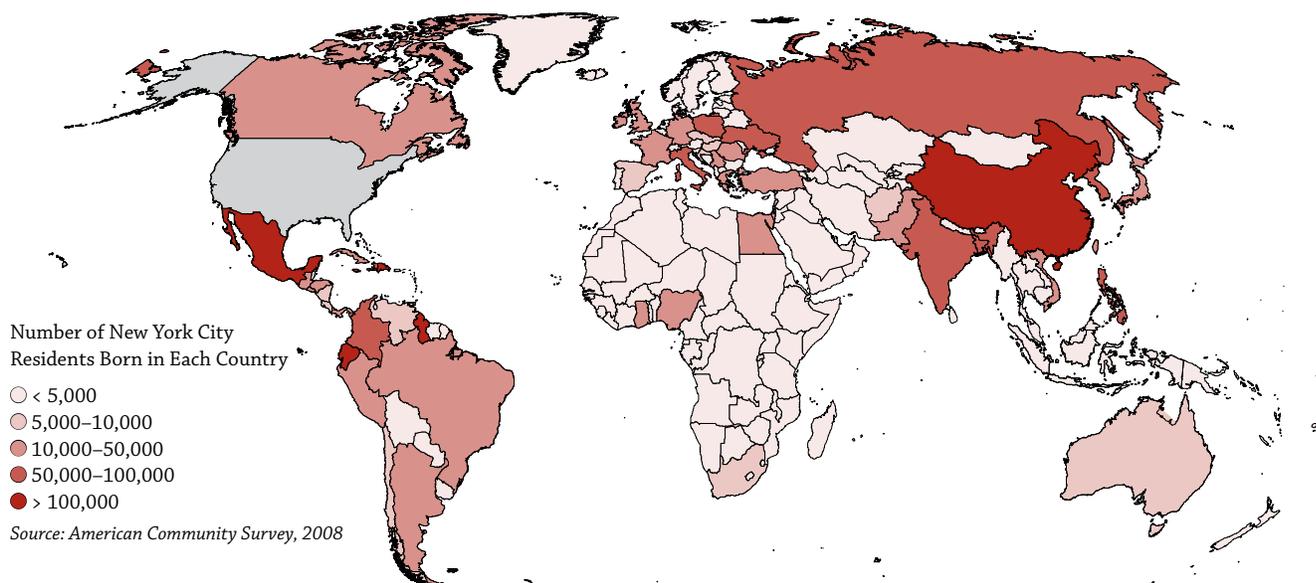
There is also an education gap between foreign-born and native-born residents of New York: foreign-born New Yorkers are twice as likely to lack a high school diploma as native-born residents. But this gap is less prominent in New York City than it is around the country. Nationwide, foreign-born residents are three times as likely to lack a high school diploma as native-born residents.

Despite having lower incomes and lower educational attainment, foreign-born New Yorkers have lower unemployment and poverty rates than their native-born counterparts. In 2008, foreign-born New Yorkers had an unemployment rate of 6.2%, compared to 8.1% among the native born. In 2008, 17.3% of foreign-born New Yorkers lived below the poverty line, compared to 18.8% of native-born residents. In both cases, this is the inverse of the national pattern, where the foreign-born population has a higher poverty rate (16%) than the

Table 2: Characteristics of Foreign-born and Native-born Residents

	NYC Foreign-born	NYC Native-born	U.S. Foreign-born	U.S. Native-born
Median Household Income	\$40,000	\$52,000	\$41,300	\$51,000
Unemployment Rate	6.2%	8.1%	6.5%	5.8%
Poverty Rate	17.3%	18.8%	16.0%	12.8%
Educational Attainment: No High School Diploma	30.0%	14.4%	32.5%	11.7%
Educational Attainment: Bachelor's Degree or Higher	26.6%	38.0%	27.1%	27.8%
Average Household Size	2.7	2.1	3.0	2.4
Crowding Rate	13.8%	3.8%	11.8%	1.8%
Severe Crowding Rate	5.8%	1.8%	4.2%	0.7%
Share Rent Burdened	49.2%	40.4%	45.2%	36.7%
Share Severely Rent Burdened	26.5%	21.3%	21.8%	18.1%
Privately Insured for Medical Costs	41.4%	58.1%	**	**
Insured through Medicare	15.4%	15.6%	**	**
Insured through Medicaid	17.5%	12.1%	**	**
Uninsured	21.4%	10.0%	**	**

Source: American Community Survey (2008), New York City Community Health Survey. ** Not Available

Figure 3: Country of Origin for Foreign-Born New York City Residents

native-born population (12.8%), and the foreign-born population has a higher unemployment rate (6.5%) than the native-born population (5.8%). It's also the inverse of patterns in most other large cities with large immigrant populations. In fact, in only one of our ten comparison cities (Chicago) did foreign-born residents have a lower poverty rate than native-born residents.

In 2008, there was a 20 percentage point nativity gap in homeownership rates nationally, with 68.6% of native-born households owning their homes, compared to 48.6% of foreign-born households. The gap is much smaller in New York City: 34.4% among native-born households and 27.9% among foreign-born households.

Among renters, foreign-born New Yorkers are much more likely to live in crowded households (defined as more than 1 person for each room in the unit): 13.8% of foreign-born households are crowded, compared to 3.8% of native-born households in New York. Similarly, the foreign born are more likely to live in severely crowded households (those where there are more than 1.5 persons for each room in the unit): 5.8% of foreign-born households live in such conditions, compared to 1.8% of native-born residents. Foreign-born New Yorkers are also more likely to pay a higher percentage of their incomes toward housing costs than native-born residents. In New York City, about half of foreign-born households are rent burdened (i.e. pay more than 30% of their income on rent) compared to 40% of native-

born households, and 26% are severely rent burdened (i.e. pay more than 50% of their income on rent) compared to 21% of native-born households.

Finally, foreign-born New Yorkers are much less likely to have private health insurance than native-born residents (42% compared to 59%, respectively), though they are more likely to be Medicaid recipients (18% compared to 13% of native-born residents).

In sum, the socioeconomic characteristics of immigrant New Yorkers are somewhat mixed, though they appear to be faring better than their counterparts around the country. They are less likely to be unemployed and less likely to be in poverty than native-born residents in New York City. And while they have lower education attainment and homeownership rates than the native born, those gaps are substantially smaller in New York City than they are nationwide. On the other hand, foreign-born households tend to be larger than native-born households, and foreign-born renters are significantly more likely to live in crowded living conditions and face burdensome rental costs than native-born renters.

IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORHOODS

While nearly all New York City neighborhoods have a higher share of immigrants than the national average, there are some areas that are majority foreign-born. To get a better understanding of what predominantly

Table 3: Characteristics of Majority Foreign-born Neighborhoods in New York City, 2008

	404 Elmhurst/ Corona (QN)	403 Jackson Heights (QN)	402 Woodside/ Sunnyside (QN)	217 East Flatbush (BK)	409 Kew Gardens/ Woodhaven (QN)	407 Flushing/ Whitestone (QN)	211 Bensonhurst (BK)	406 Rego Park/ Forest Hills (QN)	NYC
Foreign-born Population	67.6%	62.6%	60.6%	53.2%	52.7%	52.2%	50.4%	50.1%	36.4%
Share of Foreign-born Residents that have Arrived Since 2000	33.8%	25.3%	30.1%	22.9%	26.0%	23.1%	29.0%	15.7%	25.8%
Homeownership Rate	24.9%	36.5%	30.9%	31.2%	46.3%	50.5%	35.5%	48.4%	33.8%
<i>Rank</i>	34	19	28	27	13	9	22	10	
Home Purchase Loan Rate (per 1,000 properties)	32.6	29.3	32.2	10.9	23.2	32.7	32.0	32.5	24.3
<i>Rank</i>	9	16	11	55	23	8	12	10	
High Cost Home Purchase Loans (% of home purchase loans)	4.4%	3.0%	1.4%	11.2%	5.9%	2.2%	2.4%	1.9%	3.3%
<i>Rank</i>	21	26	45	5	19	35	31	37	
Units Authorized by New Building Permits	520	195	2,221	141	125	799	139	129	30,947
<i>Rank</i>	17	33	4	39	43	14	40	42	
Certificates of Occupancy Issued	318	404	559	202	261	714	331	140	22,650
<i>Rank</i>	29	22	14	44	34	5	27	51	
Felony Crime Rate (2007)	20.9	17.8	21.4	20.7	17.9	16.2	15.4	17.1	25.0
<i>Rank</i>	34	45	31	35	43	53	55	48	
Notices of Foreclosure Rate (per 1,000 1-4 family properties) (2009)	25.1	49.7	19.0	37.9	46.6	9.2	6.0	7.9	26.7
<i>Rank</i>	27	7	32	13	9	47	52	49	
Tax Delinquencies (% of residential properties delinquent ≥ 1 year)	1.4%	1.9%	1.0%	2.5%	1.5%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	1.9%
<i>Rank</i>	36	30	46	21	32	48	52	52	
Poverty Rate	17.9%	18.0%	11.4%	13.9%	11.9%	12.6%	16.9%	6.7%	18.2%
<i>Rank</i>	27	26	42	34	40	36	28	51	

Source: American Community Survey, HMDA, New York City Department of Buildings, New York City Department of City Planning, New York City Police Department, Public Data Corporation, New York City Department of Finance

immigrant neighborhoods look like, and how they compare to other neighborhoods in New York, we looked at neighborhood characteristics as of 2008 for the eight community districts where more than 50% of the population is foreign born (see Table 3). Six of the eight are located in Queens with the remaining two in Brooklyn. Although many of these neighborhoods have well-established immigrant communities, they continue to attract new immigrants as well. In all but one of these community districts, more than 20% of current foreign-born residents have arrived in the U.S. since 2000.

These majority immigrant neighborhoods have higher overall rates of home purchase lending, but fewer of those loans are high cost than in the remainder of the City’s neighborhoods. Despite this demand for homeownership, there is relatively little new building

activity in these neighborhoods. With the exception of Flushing/Whitestone, these CDs rank in the bottom half of CDs for new building permits issued and new certificates of occupancy authorized.

A recent study by the Pew Hispanic Center, “Through Boom and Bust: Minorities, Immigrants and Homeownership,” found that nationwide, counties with higher shares of immigrant residents had elevated rates of foreclosure.⁴ However, in New York City, this does not appear to be the case. None of the majority immigrant neighborhoods in the City are among the ten neighborhoods

⁴ Specifically: “The analysis finds that counties with higher shares of immigrant residents had elevated rates of foreclosure. It is estimated that of two counties with similar economic and demographic characteristics, the one whose immigrant share of the population is 10 percentage points higher than the other has a foreclosure rate that is 0.6 percentage points higher.” See <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=109>

with the highest rates of foreclosure, and half of the immigrant neighborhoods rank in the bottom half of community districts by foreclosure rate. Given the wide range of countries of origin in our majority immigrant CDs,⁵ it is noteworthy that communities with large shares of immigrants, regardless of where their residents hail from, have below average foreclosure rates.

Strong demand for homes and low rates of foreclosure signal that majority immigrant neighborhoods may be more stable than many other neighborhoods in the City. This also appears to be the case when considering traditional measures of neighborhood distress such as crime, tax delinquencies and poverty. Across the City, immigrant neighborhoods have exceptionally low rates of felony crime—all well below the citywide rate. The same is true of tax delinquencies. With the exception of East Flatbush and Jackson Heights, all majority immigrant neighborhoods have lower tax delinquency rates than the City average, with four of the eight neighborhoods ranking at the very bottom of all CDs. Finally, the majority immigrant CDs have relatively low rates of poverty, which is not surprising given the earlier finding that foreign-born New Yorkers have lower rates of poverty than native-born residents.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this section of the report regarding immigrants, immigrant households, and immigrant neighborhoods comes from the 2008 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) and the Public Use Microdata Sample from that survey. The Census Bureau defines the foreign-born population in the following way:

The foreign-born population includes anyone who was not a U.S. citizen or a U.S. national at birth. This includes respondents who indicated they were a U.S. citizen by naturalization or not a U.S. citizen. The American Community Survey questionnaires do not ask about immigration status. The population surveyed includes all people who indicated that the United States was their usual place of residence on the survey date. The foreign-born population includes naturalized

U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (e.g., foreign students), humanitarian migrants (e.g., refugees), and unauthorized migrants (people illegally present in the United States).⁶

The data for this section of the report defining nativity and health insurance coverage comes from the New York City Department of Health's 2008 Community Health Survey. Both the Department of Health and the ACS include all U.S. territories and Puerto Rico in the native-born population.

This analysis makes no distinction between documented or undocumented immigrants. Nationwide, the ACS had a 97.9% response rate in 2008 with a 96% response rate in New York State. Of all the completed surveys, 2.5% were missing data for the question about citizenship while 7% were missing data for the question about place of birth. The missing data rates were slightly higher in New York State, at 3.2% and 9% respectively. When this or other data was missing, the ACS used "statistical procedures, such as within-household or nearest neighbor matrices populated by donors, to impute for missing values."⁷

All of the data in the ACS are self-reported which may introduce some reporting bias on sensitive questions. Although the Census and ACS data are collected separately and are not shared with other government agencies (such as the IRS, Immigrant and Customs Enforcement or the FBI), certain groups, notably undocumented immigrants, may still be reluctant to answer the survey for fear of attracting the attention of immigration authorities. There is speculation that when these groups do answer the survey, they may answer untruthfully to some sensitive questions, such as ones about unemployment or household crowding. Similar skepticism of authority may also cause immigrants to report crimes and housing code violations at lower rates than native-born residents.

Even given these imperfections in data collection, we think that the ACS provides a valuable glimpse into the immigrant community in New York City. ■

5 For many of these CDs, the country of origin information is highlighted on the tops of the individual CD pages.

6 <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/2008/usedata/2008%20ACS%20Subject%20Definitions.pdf>

7 http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/sse/ita/ita_def.htm