



IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER

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POLICY BRIEF

Minority Newcomers: Fair Comparisons of Immigrants and the Native Born

by Walter A. Ewing, Ph.D.*

Comparisons of the mostly “minority” foreign-born and mostly “white” native-born populations that fail to account for the socioeconomic impact of ethnicity incorrectly suggest that place of birth, rather than minority status, is the primary factor explaining disparities between immigrants and natives. However, a more accurate – and fair – comparison of immigrants and natives within the same ethnic group suggests otherwise.

Nearly all immigrants must overcome the linguistic and cultural challenges of being newcomers in a new land. But the majority of contemporary immigrants to the United States face an added challenge: they become members of U.S. “minority” groups and therefore confront the same educational and employment hurdles as “native” minorities. This is a crucial consideration when comparing immigrants and natives in light of the fact that over three-quarters of the native born are non-Hispanic “whites,” while over three-quarters of the foreign born are ethnic minorities.¹ Comparisons of the “foreign born” and “native born” as ethnically undifferentiated wholes fail to account for the socioeconomic impact of belonging to a minority group. A more accurate – and fair – comparison of immigrants and natives within the same ethnic group reveals that the socioeconomic disparities experienced by the foreign born have more to do with minority status than with place of birth.

Native and Foreign-Born Minorities

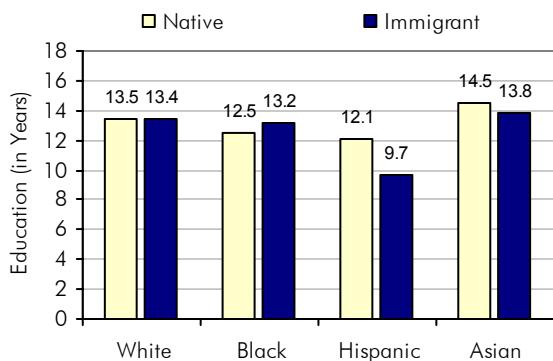
A June 2003 study by the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research uses data from the 2000 census to compare native-born and foreign-born whites, blacks, Hispanics and Asians in terms of educational attainment, household income and rates of unemployment and poverty. The study found that, contrary to what general comparisons of immigrants and natives suggest, “[i]mmigrants have a similar socioeconomic profile to that of persons of the same race/ethnicity born in the U.S. Among blacks they are doing better than natives. Among all groups

they have a lower unemployment rate.”² Moreover, socioeconomic disparities between the major ethnic groups are significantly greater than disparities between foreign-born and native-born members of the same ethnic group.

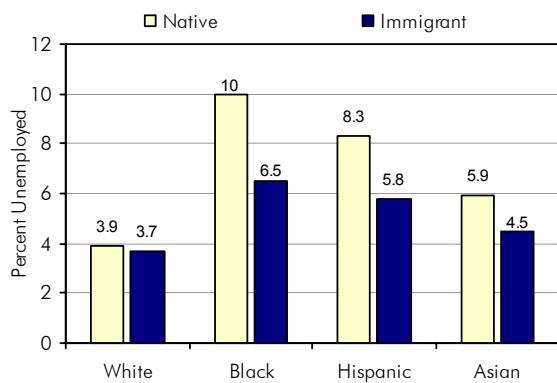
Specifically, the study found that:

- Among (non-Hispanic) whites, 96.5% of whom were native born and 3.5% foreign born in 2000,³ immigrants averaged 0.1 year less education than natives, \$1,000 less in median household income, a 0.2% lower unemployment rate, and a 2.9% higher poverty rate.
- Among blacks, 93.9% of whom were native born and 6.1% foreign born in 2000,⁴ immigrants averaged 0.7 years more education than natives, \$8,800 more in median household income, a 3.5% lower unemployment rate, and an 8.5% lower poverty rate.
- Among Hispanics, 59.8% of whom were native born and 40.2% foreign born in 2000,⁵ immigrants averaged 2.4 years less education than natives, \$800 less in median household income, a 2.5% lower unemployment rate, and a 0.3% higher poverty rate.
- Among Asians, 31.1% of whom were native born and 68.9% foreign born in 2000,⁶ immigrants averaged 0.7 years less education than natives, \$4,500 less in median household income, a 1.4% lower unemployment rate, and a 2.3% higher poverty rate.

Educational Attainment of Major Ethnic Groups by Nativity (2000)



Unemployment Rates of Major Ethnic Groups by Nativity (2000)



Source: John R. Logan, *America's Newcomers*. Albany, NY: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban & Regional Research, State University of New York at Albany, June 18, 2003.

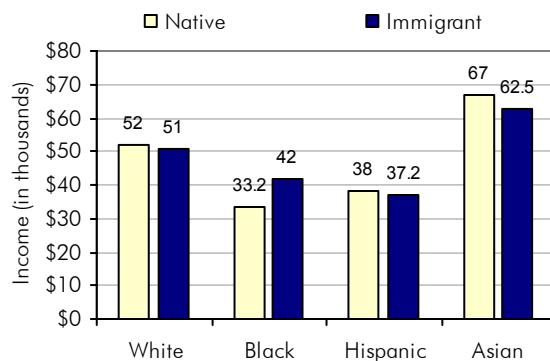
Fair Comparisons

Immigrants are no less susceptible than natives to the socioeconomic effects of ethnic inequality in U.S. society. As a result, comparisons of the mostly “minority” foreign-born and mostly “white” native-born populations that fail to account for the socioeconomic impact of ethnicity incorrectly suggest that place of birth, rather than minority status, is the primary factor explaining disparities between immigrants and natives. However, the empirical evidence suggests otherwise. When immigrants and natives are compared within the same ethnic group, the disparities between native born and foreign born are relatively small. Far from being evidence that immigrants are unable to advance or “assimilate,” these results in fact illustrate the resourcefulness of immigrants in the face of enduring ethnic inequalities in the United States.

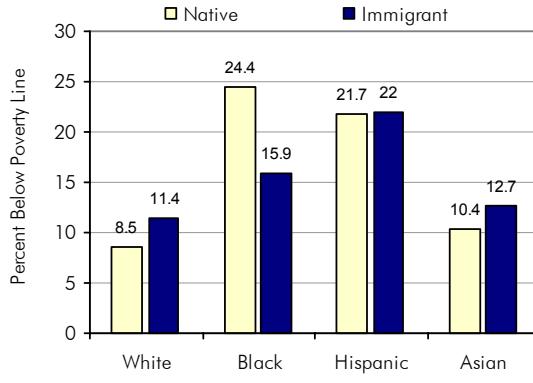
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Median Household Income of Major Ethnic Groups by Nativity (2000)



Poverty Rates of Major Ethnic Groups by Nativity (2000)



Endnotes

¹ A. Dianne Schmidley, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, Current Population Reports, Series P23-206. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2001, p. 24.

² John R. Logan, *America's Newcomers*. Albany, NY: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban & Regional Research, State University of New York at Albany, June 18, 2003.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table PCT63I.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table PCT63B.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table PCT63H.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table PCT63D.