



Measures of Immigrant Integration in Los Angeles County

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Summary

Home to an immigrant population of nearly 3.5 million persons, Los Angeles County has a powerful interest in understanding how immigrant populations are progressing over time and showing signs of integration. This report examines social and economic progress of major immigrant groups in L.A. County using a cohort-type methodology in which the status of groups is followed as they age over time.

The report follows progress of Los Angeles immigrants who entered the U.S. during the 1980s and were between 25 and 34 years of age as of the 1990 census. Their situation is tracked across the 1990, 2000 and the 2006–2008 periods and compared to a benchmark group, native-born whites, to see whether socioeconomic gaps between the immigrant groups and the native-born whites appear to narrow or widen over time. The featured groups represent the county’s largest foreign-born populations: Mexico, El Salvador, Philippines, Guatemala, Korea, Vietnam, China and Taiwan.

Following are selected highlights from the report:

Education

- In most instances, the major immigrant groups improved their educational levels over time and narrowed gaps between their own educational attainment and that of native-born whites.
- For example, some 33.5 percent of Korean immigrants who were 25–34 years of age had a college degree in 1990, but by the 2006–2008 period some 47.0 percent of the immigrants had completed college. As a result, this group of Korean immigrants raised their education level close to that of whites.

Poverty

- Each immigrant cohort saw its poverty rate fall dramatically between 1990 and 2006–2008, even while poverty among the white native-born comparison group rose. Thus, by the 2006–2008 period, immigrant poverty levels were lower and much closer to the poverty level of native-born whites.

Home Ownership

- Immigrant home ownership levels rose substantially over the study period and almost each of the major groups saw its home ownership rate rise against that of whites. Mexican immigrants, for example, had a home ownership rate of 15.3 percent in 1990 but by 2006–2008 it rose to 46.8 percent.

Family Income

- All immigrant groups experienced family income gains, but income gaps between immigrants and native-born whites showed little change.¹
- For example, each of the major immigrant groups aged 25–34 in 1990 experienced gains in median family income over time. Median family income among Taiwanese immigrants nearly doubled between 1990 and 2006–2008. (All income amounts are adjusted for inflation.) Nevertheless, most immigrants groups showed little or no progress in catching up to income levels of native-born whites.

Immigrant integration is a critical issue for Los Angeles County. Some 3.5 million foreign-born persons reside in the county, and they comprise almost 36 percent of the population. Los Angeles County is well known as a foremost destination for immigrants to the United States.

¹ In terms of poverty levels, immigrants gained ground against native-born whites, but in terms of income levels, the immigrants made little if any progress in closing gaps with whites. These trends may appear contradictory, but it is entirely possible for one group to cross the poverty threshold (which is a fixed income level) and still not have the same rate of income growth seen in another population.

Introduction

The current foreign-born population in L.A. County has half a dozen groups with 100,000+ members, including 1.5 million persons from Mexico, 266,000 from El Salvador, and 226,000 from the Philippines. While recent immigration has slowed substantially, for millions of arrivals from recent decades, L.A. County is their permanent home, and few places in the U.S. have as much at stake in the successful integration of immigrant communities

Integration of immigrants affects more than just the immigrants themselves. All metropolitan areas have an interest in developing a society marked by upward mobility among major communities, and by the absence of large gaps in social and economic conditions. Immigrant integration is an indicator of the overall well-being of a place and a marker of its desirability as a place to live.

Existing definitions of immigrant integration reflect the idea that inclusiveness is a key value. Some authors describe immigrant integration as a “process of economic mobility and social inclusion of newcomers,”² while others add that the integration is represented by “improved economic mobility for, enhanced civic participation by, and receiving society openness to immigrants.”³ For Los Angeles County, this implies that, over time, immigrants would ideally see their socioeconomic status improve in real terms while their characteristics would begin to approximate those of the native-born population.

Most discussions of immigrant integration use point-in-time comparisons of immigrant and native groups. Recent analyses of immigrant integration in Los Angeles County have gone further, by contrasting the status of immigrants from different arrival periods to natives,⁴ or have discussed the emerging second generation of natives born to immigrant parents.⁵

This study adds another dimension to our understanding of integration, namely, how age- and country-specific groups fare over time compared to native-born whites. The measures used are widely utilized, readily available, replicable over time, and applicable to all major populations.

The Value-Added of This Analysis

Implicit in many discussions of immigrant integration is the idea that integration ameliorates socioeconomic disparity.¹ But explicit analysis of this idea is often lacking. The present report looks at whether integration may modulate social and economic distance. It does this, furthermore, not at the national level, but in Los Angeles County, where the impact of integration—or lack of it—is of high stakes, given the large size of the foreign-born population there. Finally, it offers a high level of specificity with regard to variation in experience by country of origin.

¹ See, for example, the chapters in Fix, Michael (editor), 2007, *Securing the Future: US Immigrant Integration Policy*, Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

² Fix, et al., 2007, *An Analytic Framework for Developing an Immigrant Integration Strategy for Los Angeles County*, Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

³ Pastor, Manuel and Ortiz, Rhonda, 2009, *Immigrant Integration in Los Angeles: Strategic Directions for Funders*, Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, Program for Environmental and Regional Equity.

⁴ Ibid. Pastor and Ortiz, 2009.

⁵ Ibid. Fix, et al., 2007.

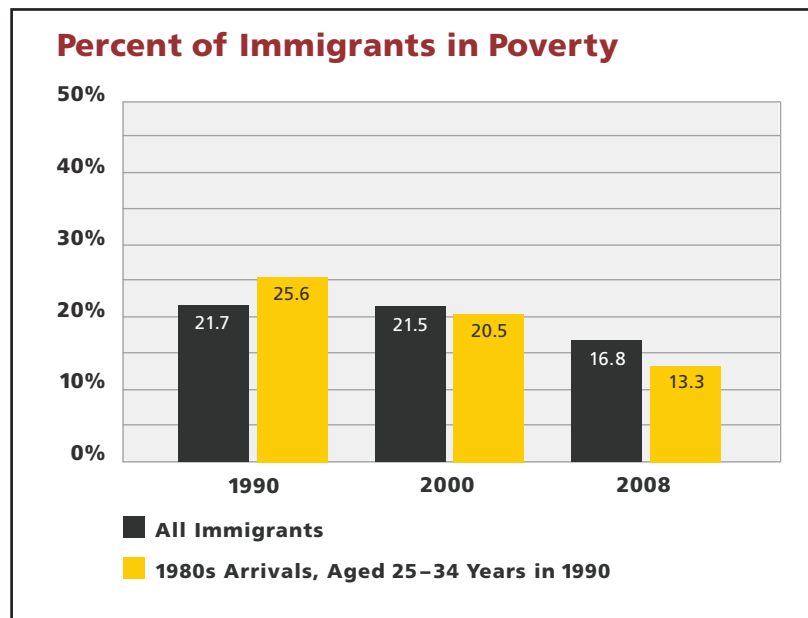
Methodology

Cohort-Type Analysis

Academicians have demonstrated the importance of evaluating immigrant progress in ways that go beyond looking at the most recent census data showing that many immigrants have limited English and low income, and extrapolating that immigrants are in a permanently disadvantaged position. Dowell Myers of USC and others have pointed out the importance of following immigrants through their life course, as they age and have time to integrate into society.⁶

For example, a snapshot of all foreign-born persons in L.A. County in 1990, 2000 and 2008 shows only a small decline in their poverty rate from 1990 to 2008, and this can lead to the impression that immigrants are stuck in poverty. A more helpful analysis—used in this report—follows a “cohort” of immigrants to see whether their situation changes.⁷ For example, the chart below shows that 1980s arrivals who were 25–34 years of age in 1990 cut their poverty rate in half between 1990 and 2008.

This report uses a cohort-type analysis involving the largest immigrant groups in L.A. County and the period of greatest immigration to the county: the 1980s when the foreign-born community grew by a record 1.2 million persons. The analysis is further narrowed to immigrants who were aged 25–34 years in 1990 and who were as old as 52 by 2008 (although all immigrants analyzed for this report entered the U.S. in the 1980s). Choosing this age group avoids 1980s arrivals were still so young as of 1990 that they had not had a chance to finish their education or enter the labor market (a fact that would lead to misleading impressions of change as they aged) and avoids analysis of relatively older immigrants who might have their opportunities constricted merely by their age. Indeed, 25–34 year olds were 37 percent of all working-age immigrants in L.A. County who arrived in the 1980s, so they are a large and important segment of the population to focus on with regards to integration.



⁶ Myers, Dowell, 2007, *Immigrants and Boomers: Forging a New Social Contract for the future of America* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

⁷ The cohorts tracked in this report are constructed, because the census and American Community Survey do not identify individuals across surveys. Between the 1990 and 2000 census, those individuals aged 25–34 in 1990 are not exactly the same as those 35–44 ten years later. Between the two survey periods, mortality, in-migration and out-migration change the nature of the population somewhat. But the use of artificial cohorts has a long and respected history in immigration studies.

Los Angeles County Immigrant Population

	Foreign-Born Population	# Change During Decade	% Change During Decade
1930	366,208		
1940	356,747	-9,461	-2.60%
1950	415,628	58,881	16.50%
1960	576,380	160,752	38.70%
1970	793,209	216,829	37.60%
1980	1,664,793	871,584	109.80%
1990	2,895,066	1,230,273	73.90%
2000	3,449,444	554,378	19.40%
2006–2008 average	3,491,729	42,285	12.30%

Data Sources

Sources of data for this report are the decennial censuses of 1990 and 2000, and the American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008. Records from the 2006–2008 ACS are combined to produce a larger and more reliable sample.

Methodology Snapshot

Population	Immigrants who arrived in the U.S. during the 1980s and who reside in Los Angeles County, California.
Integration Measures	Education, income, labor force and home ownership
“Cohort” Analysis	Assess socioeconomic levels of 1980s immigrants in 1990, in 2000 and in 2006–2008 period
Data Source	U.S. Census Bureau surveys
Other controls	Track specific age group

Variables

The following variables and universes are used in the report:

- High school completion: Based on persons 25 years or older a high school diploma/GED or higher level of education.
- College completion: Based on persons 25 years or older with a bachelor's degree or higher level of education.
- Labor Force Participation: Based on persons 16 years and older in the civilian labor force.
- Poverty: Based on persons of all ages for whom poverty status is determined.
- Home Ownership: Based on individuals living in housing units owned free and clear and in mortgaged housing units.
- Family Income: Includes persons in families; all dollar amounts in this report refer to family householders and are expressed in 2008 amounts.

Populations

The major populations discuss in the report are displayed below. Together the eight groups represent 74 percent of the foreign-born population in the county. These groups were selected on the basis of providing substantial numbers of survey records in 1990 for persons who arrived during the 1980s and fell into the age group 16–45 by 1990.⁸ The groups and their total population (including all ages and periods of arrival) in 2006–2008 are as follows.

Labor Force Measurement

Readers of this report will note that most groups show a decline in their labor force participation rate between 1990 and 2000, and a subsequent rise to the 2006–2008 period. For example, 76.0 percent of Mexican immigrants aged 25–34 in 1990 were in the labor force, but only 58.8 percent were in the labor force in 2000. By the 2006–2008 period, their participation rate rose to 78.2 percent. Similar trends are observed for foreign-born Salvadorans, Filipinos, Guatemalans

Foreign-Born Groups in Los Angeles County 2006–2008

	Population	Percent of Total
Total	3,491,729	100.00%
Mexico	1,455,492	41.70%
El Salvador	265,668	7.60%
Philippines	225,650	6.50%
Guatemala	162,223	4.60%
Korea	155,077	4.40%
China	151,889	4.30%
Vietnam	91,055	2.60%
Taiwan	66,425	1.90%
Other	918,250	26.30%

Source: 2006–2008 American Community Survey

Labor Force Participation Rates (%) of Immigrants

	1990	2000	2006–2008
U.S.	64.9	63.7	65.1
California	66.6	62.2	64.6
L.A. County	67.1	60.5	64.8

Note: Based on civilian labor force

Source: 1990 and 2000 decennial census; 2006–2008 American Community Survey

⁸ No group had less than 126 actual records in any cell of the age by time of arrival matrix.

and Vietnamese. Indeed, the nation, the state of California and Los Angeles County as a whole had a drop in labor force participation from 1990 to 2000, and a subsequent rise between 2000 and the 2006–2008 period, as seen in the table below.

Appendix One provides further discussion of the dip in labor force participation rate reported in 2000, with consideration of sampling issues and the possible effects of gender and race/ethnicity. The dip in labor force participation for nearly all groups in 2000 is likely a measurement problem.

Limitations of the Methodology

Since 1990 (the first data point in this report) there has been more out-migration of native-born persons (especially whites) than of other populations in L.A. County. Between April 1, 2000 and July 1, 2009, for example, Los Angeles County experienced negative domestic migration of 1.1 million natives versus a net international migration of 651,000. Thus the average characteristics of native-born whites, who are the benchmark against which immigrants are compared, may have changed more dramatically than in the case of immigrants.

The report measures social and economic difference between immigrants and natives, and from this perspective the characteristics of either group at a given point in time matters less than whether there is difference or not between the groups. Also, most of the reductions in disparity shown by the report are due to improvement among immigrants rather than by decline or stagnation among natives.

The study focuses on the cohort of immigrants and natives who were aged 25–34 years in 1990. Selecting another age group may result in different findings, although, as noted in the Methodology, the 25–34 year olds are a large portion of all working-age immigrants.

Using the 2006–2008 combined ACS records means that persons across a 12-year age span are included in the last time period of this analysis. For example, a 25 year old in 1990 is 41 in 2006, 42 in 2007 and 43 in 2008. A 34 year old in 1990 is 50 in 2006, 51 in 2007 and 52 in 2008. Thus the 25–34 year old cohort of 1990 includes persons as young as 41 and as old as 52 in the 2006–2008 ACS records. But any person selected from the 2006–2008 ACS records was indeed between 25 and 34 years of age in 1990.

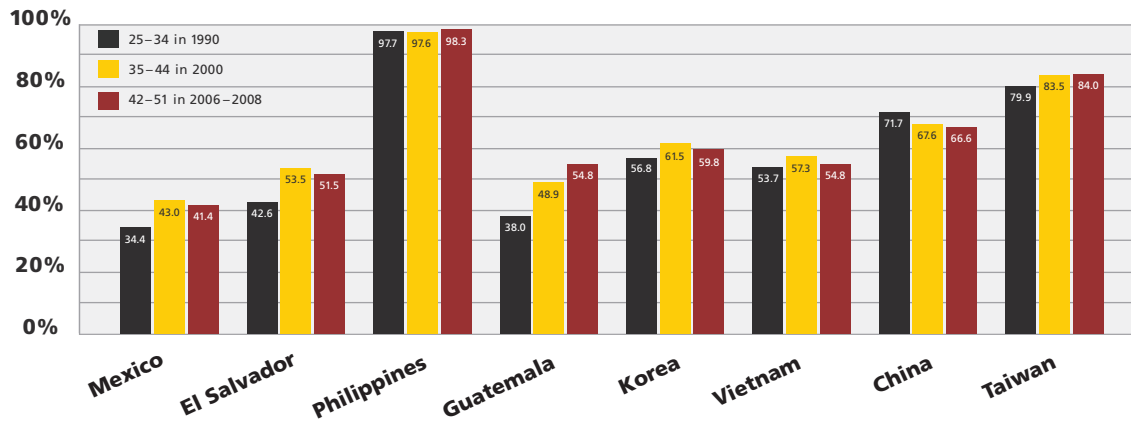
Findings

English Language Ability

English ability higher especially for Latino groups

Immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala reported much higher levels of English ability as they aged. About 34 percent of Mexicans aged 25–34 years in 1990 spoke English “well” or better. By the 2006–2008 period, some 41 percent of this cohort said that they spoke English at least “well.”

Percent Who Speak English Well or Better in Los Angeles County

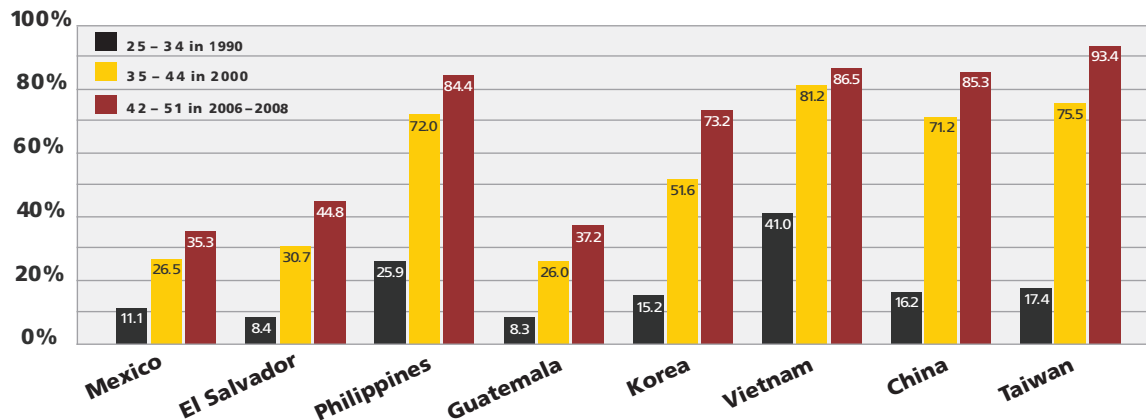


Citizenship

All groups report dramatic gains in citizenship

Each of the major immigrant groups in Los Angeles County had sharp gains in citizenship over time. For example, only 25.9 percent of Filipinos aged 25–34 years in 1990 were U.S. citizens, but by 2006–2008 more than 84 percent of this population reported having naturalized. The largest increase was among immigrants from Taiwan. The Taiwanese cohort increased its naturalization rate by a factor of 5.4 from 1990 to 2006–2008, or from 17.4 percent naturalized to 93.4 percent naturalized.

Percent Naturalized in Los Angeles County

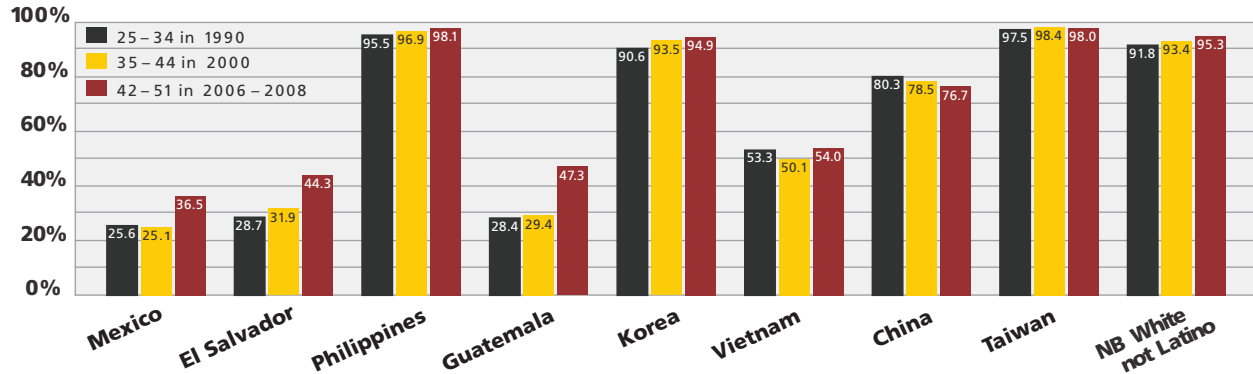


High School Completion: Progress over Time

Most of the major immigrant groups saw their high school attainment levels rise

Seven of the eight major immigrant groups saw their education level increase between 1990 and 2006–2008. About 25.6 percent of Mexican immigrants aged 25–34 years of age in 1990 had a high school degree, but by 2006–2008 the percent in that cohort had risen to 36.5. Only immigrants from China saw some decline in their education level over the survey periods.⁹

Percentage of High School Completion by Age

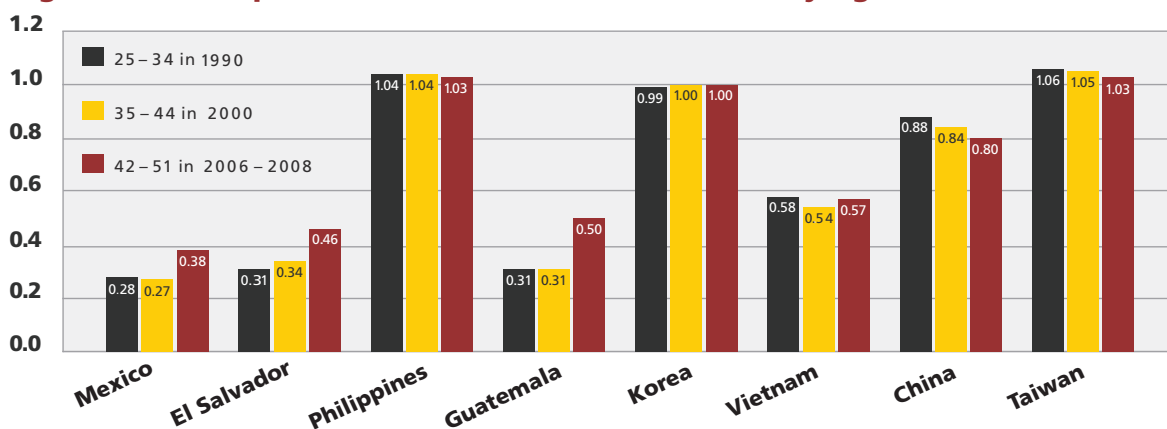


High School Completion: Progress in Integration

Most of the major immigrant groups narrowed the education gap with natives

Of the eight largest immigrant groups in Los Angeles, six had high school completion rates lower than native-born whites in 1990. Four of the six saw their high school completion rate grow closer to that of native-born whites by 2006–2008. This included immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Korea. Immigrants from the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan had high school completion rates that changed little in comparison to native-born whites. Immigrants from China had education levels that fell somewhat against natives; the high school graduation rate of Chinese immigrants aged 25–34 in 1990 was 88% that of native-born whites, but by 2006–2008 the Chinese graduation rate fell to 80% of the rate for native-born whites.

High School Completion: Ratio to Native-Born Whites by Age Cohort Over Time



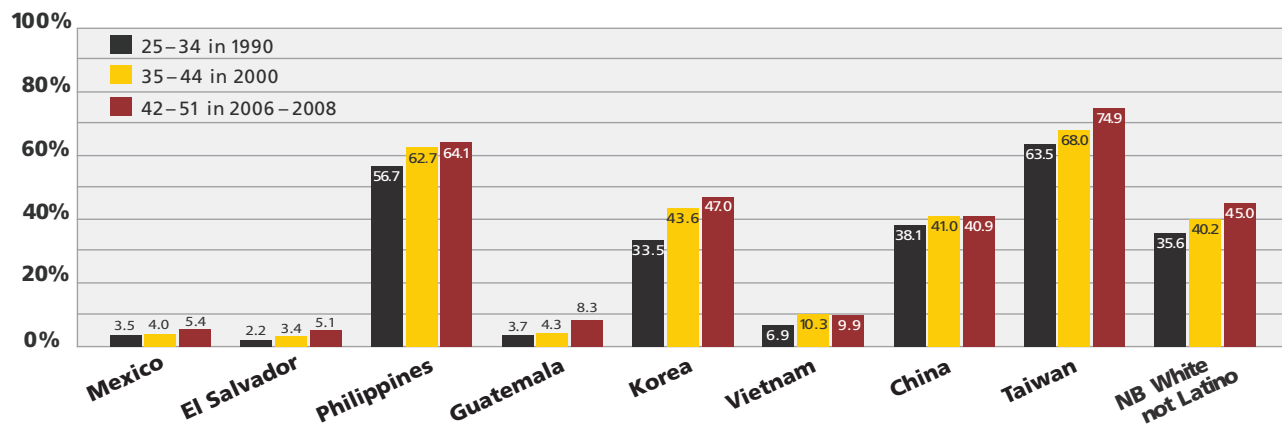
⁹ Declining rates of education may be due to sampling variability or to in- and out-migration changing the makeup of a community.

College Completion: Progress over Time

College completion rates increased for almost all immigrant groups, doubling among some populations

All of the featured immigrant groups as well as the native-born white comparison group saw their college completion rate increase between 1990 and 2006–2008. The percentage of Koreans with a college degree, for example, rose from 33.5 in 1990 to 47.0 in 2006–2008 in the cohort considered. Immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala had the lowest levels of college completion, but they also had some of the highest increases over time. Immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala who were aged 25–34 years in 1990 more than doubled their college completion rate by the period 2006–2008.

Percentage of College Completion Rates by Age

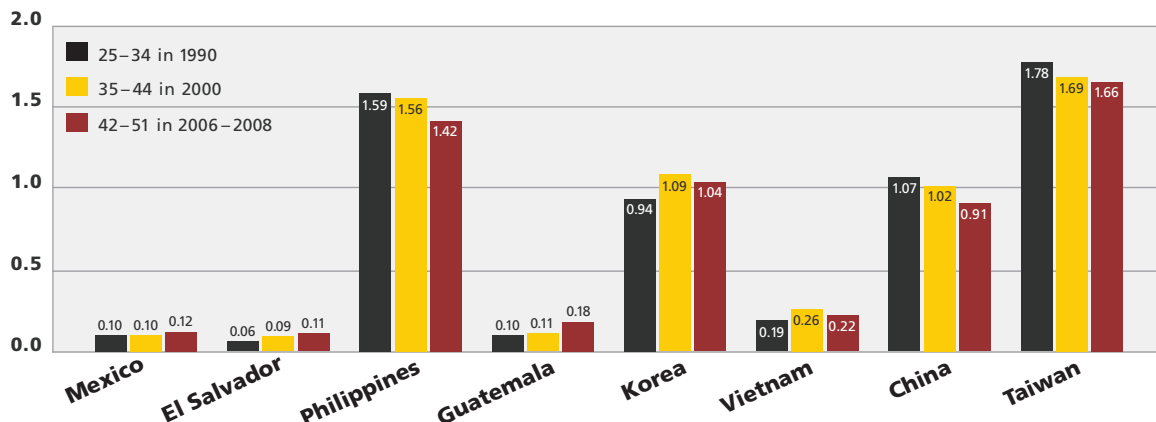


College Completion: Progress in Integration

Gaps in college completion narrowed somewhat, though large discrepancies remain

Five of the eight major immigrant groups narrowed the gap between themselves and native-born whites between 1990 and 2006–2008, if only slightly. The Mexican college completion rate rose from .10 that of native-born whites to .12, for example.¹⁰ The college completion rate of immigrants from the Philippines and Taiwan fell against native-born whites, but these groups continued to have college attainment levels well in excess of the comparison group.

College Completion: Ratio to Native-Born Whites by Age Cohort Over Time



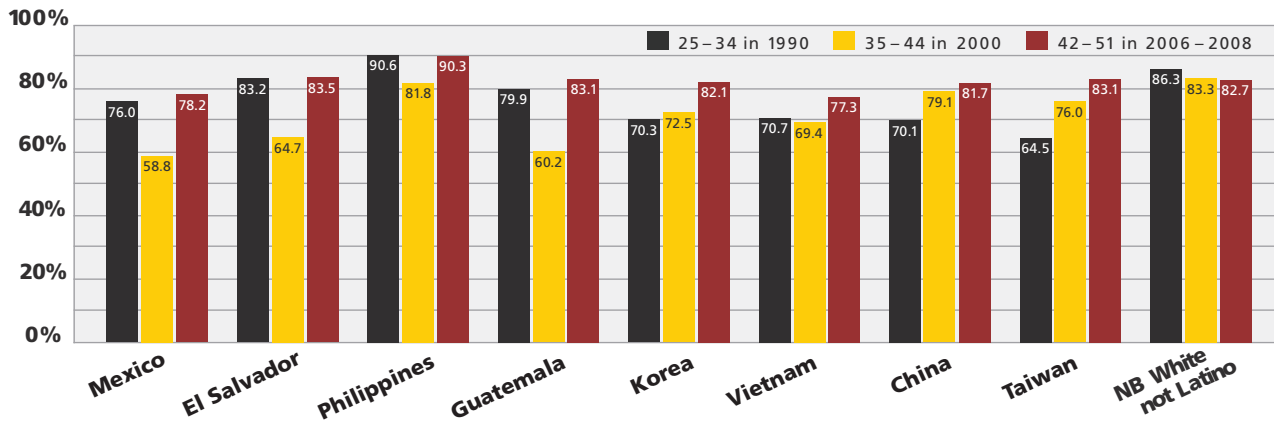
¹⁰ Note that closing the college completion gap with whites amounted to chasing a moving target: native-born whites raised their own completion rate by more than nine percentage points from 1990 to 2006–2008.

Labor Force Participation: Progress over Time

Increase in immigrant labor force participation contrasts with decline among native-born whites

Among persons 25–34 years of age in 1990, labor force participation rates rose for the major immigrant groups over the years even as they declined among native-born whites of comparable age.¹¹ Labor force participation of Mexican-born immigrants, for example, rose from 76.0 percent when they were in the 25–34 age range to 78.2 as they aged to 41–52 years of age in the 2006–2008 period. The comparable rise for immigrants from Taiwan was 64.5 percent in 1990 to 83.1 percent in 2006–2008. During the same timeframe, participation in the labor force among native-born whites fell by more than four percentage points.

Percentage of Labor Force Participation Rates By Age

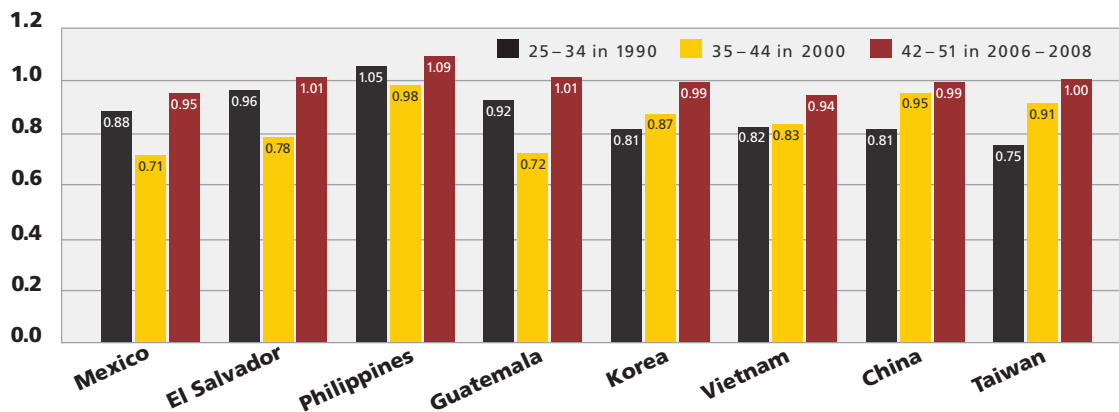


Labor Force Participation: Progress in Integration

Gaps narrow between immigrants and native-born whites

The opposite trends in labor force participation (rising among immigrants and falling among the native-born whites) meant that immigrants narrowed existing gaps between them and the native-born white population. Participation rates of Salvadorans, Filipinos, Guatemalans and Taiwanese met or exceeded that of whites in 2006–2008, and other groups were close to the rate of whites.

Labor Force Participation: Ratio to Native-Born Whites by Age Cohort Over Time



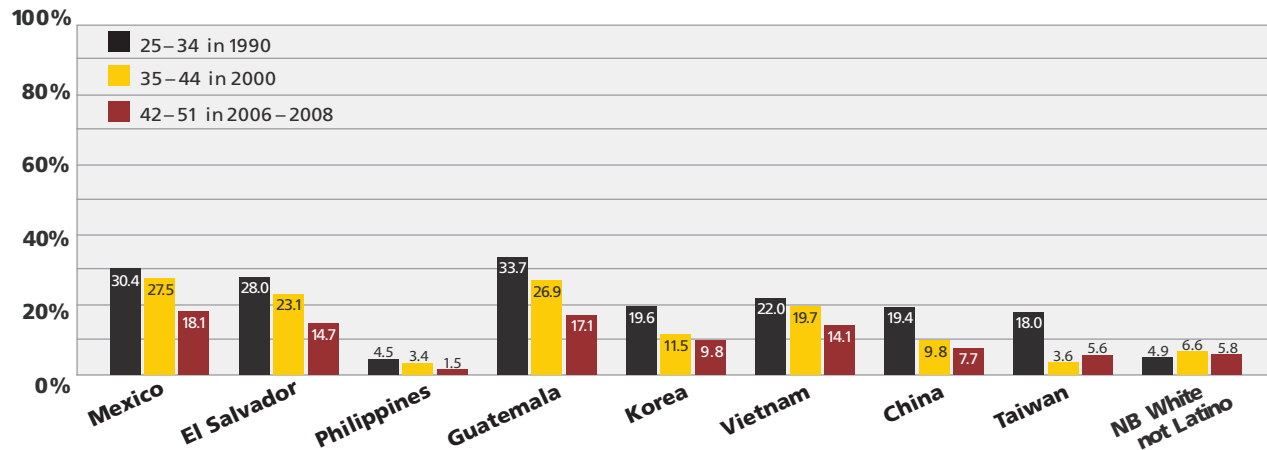
¹¹ As noted in the Methodology, the 2000 dip in labor force participation for most groups is likely a measurement issue. See the Appendix for a fuller discussion.

Poverty: Progress over Time

Poverty declines sharply among immigrant cohorts; rises among native-born whites

Each immigrant cohort saw its poverty rate fall dramatically between 1990 and 2006–2008, even while poverty among the white native-born comparison group rose. Poverty rates among the Guatemalan cohort fell by almost half, from 33.7 percent in 1990 to 17.1 percent in 2006–2008. Among the Taiwanese cohort poverty fell by more than two thirds, from 18.0 to 5.6 percent. The rate among native-born whites rose from 4.9 to 5.8 percent.

Poverty Rate by Age Cohort

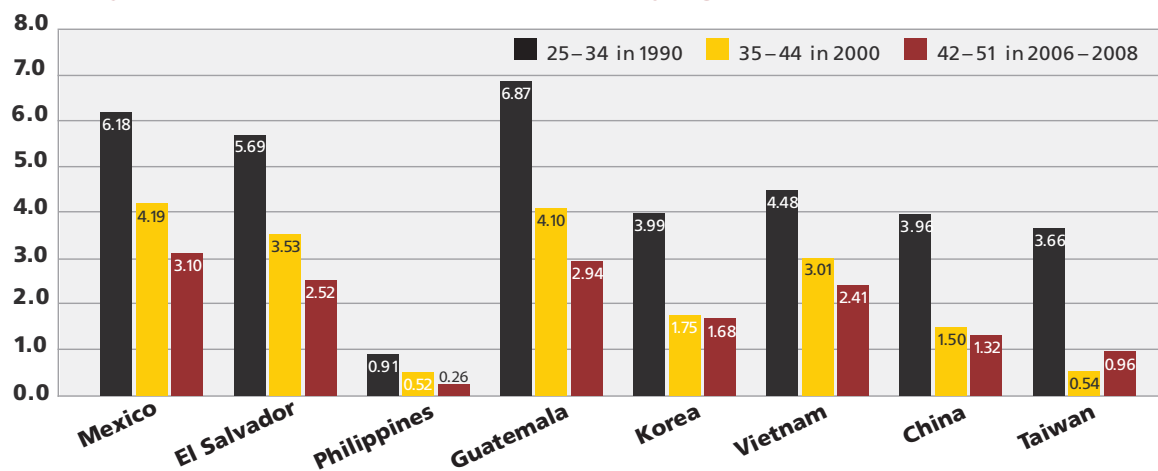


Poverty: Progress in Integration

Poverty gap narrows between immigrants and native-born whites

The effect of poverty rates heading in different directions for native-born whites and for the major immigrant groups is that the latter gained ground against the former. While Guatemalans aged 25–34 years in 1990 had a poverty rate that was almost seven times that of comparably aged whites, by 2007 the ratio of Guatemalan to native-born poverty had fallen to less than three. For Taiwanese immigrants, their poverty rate exceeded that of comparable native-born whites by three times in 1990, but by 2007 there were proportionally fewer Taiwanese immigrants than native-born whites in poverty.

Poverty Rate: Ratio to Native-Born Whites by Age Cohort Over Time

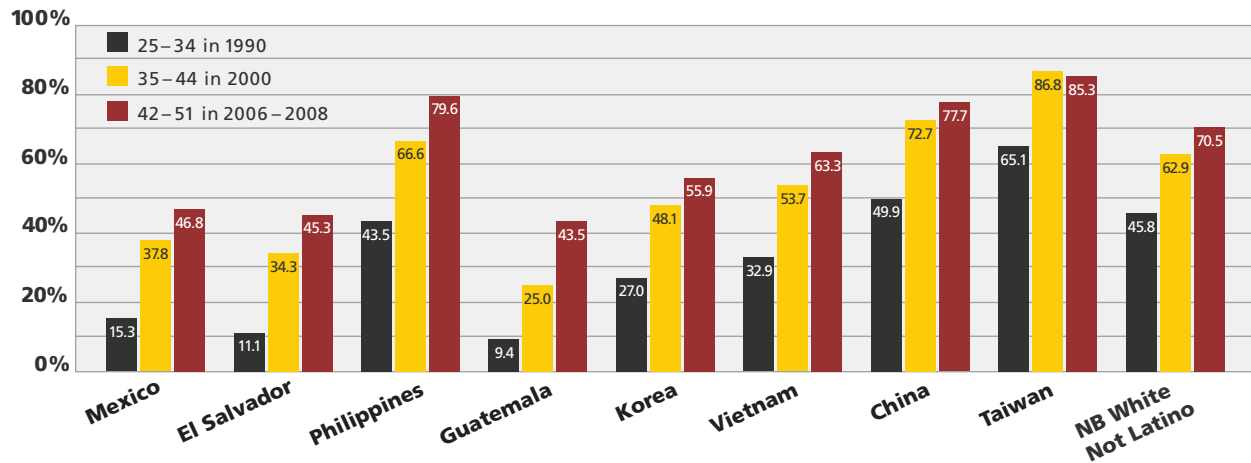


Home Ownership: Progress Over Time

Immigrant home ownership levels rise substantially

Members of the major immigrant groups who were aged 25–34 years in 1990 had generally sharp increases in homeownership by 2006–2008. Mexican immigrants in this cohort had a home ownership rate of 15.3 percent in 1990 but by 2006–2008 it rose to 46.8. Similar, sharp gains were seen among other groups such as immigrants from the Philippines (whose ownership rate rose from 43.5 to 79.6) and China (49.9 to 77.7).

Home Ownership by Age Cohort

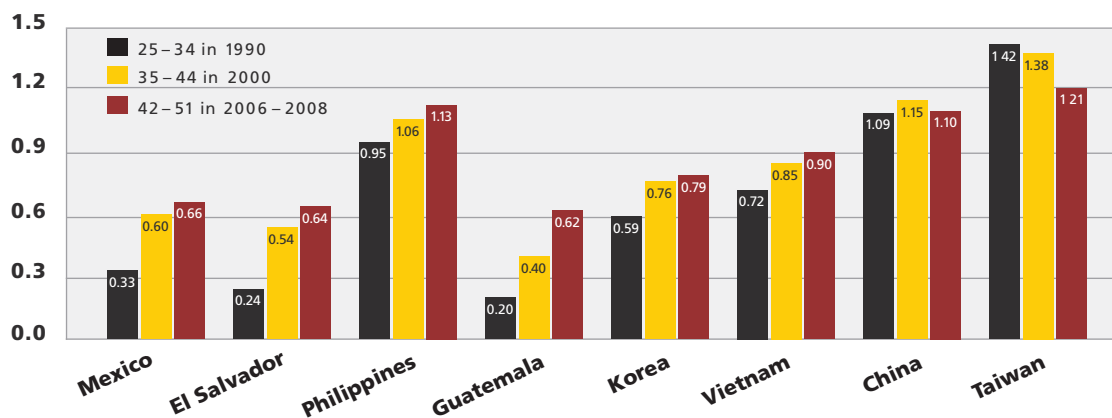


Home Ownership: Progress in Integration

Differences in home ownership level out

Native-born whites had sharp increases in their rate of home ownership across the period 1990 to 2006–2008 (up from 46 to 71 percent), but the rise in immigrant home ownership outpaced that of the white native-born. As a result, almost each of the major groups saw its home ownership rate rise against whites. (Immigrants from Taiwan were the only group whose home ownership rate fell against native-born whites, yet Taiwanese immigrants still had higher rates of home ownership than whites.)

Home Ownership: Ratio to Native-Born Whites by Age Cohort Over Time

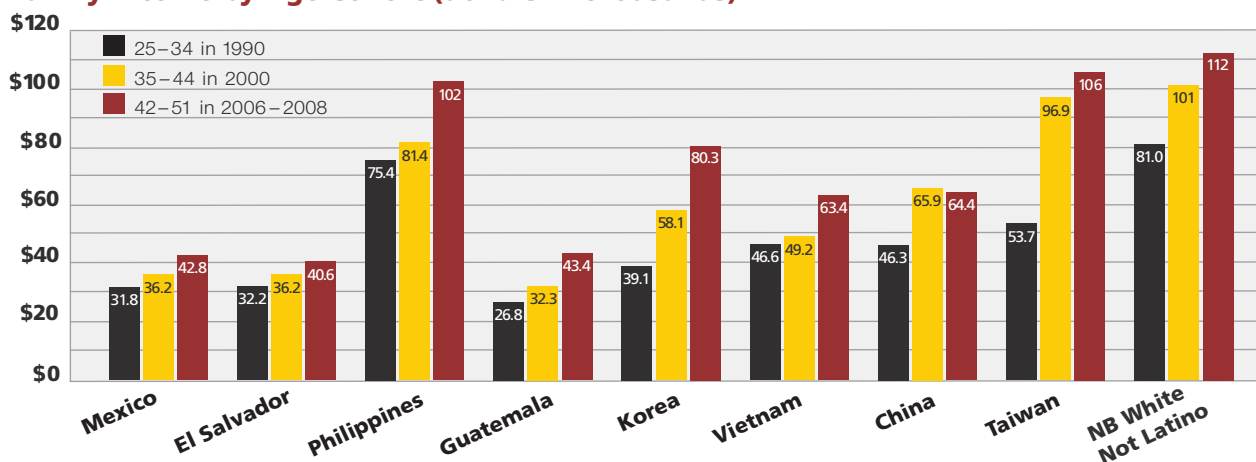


Family Income: Progress over Time

All immigrant groups experience family income gains

Each of the major immigrant groups aged 25–34 in 1990 experienced gains in median family income as its members aged. Median family income among Koreans was the most dramatic, doubling for the age cohort between 1990 and 2006–2008. Income among immigrants from Taiwan also nearly doubled. Guatemalan immigrants, whose family income in 1990 was lowest among the cohorts, at \$26,825, had an almost 62 percent increase.

Family Income by Age Cohort (dollars in thousands)

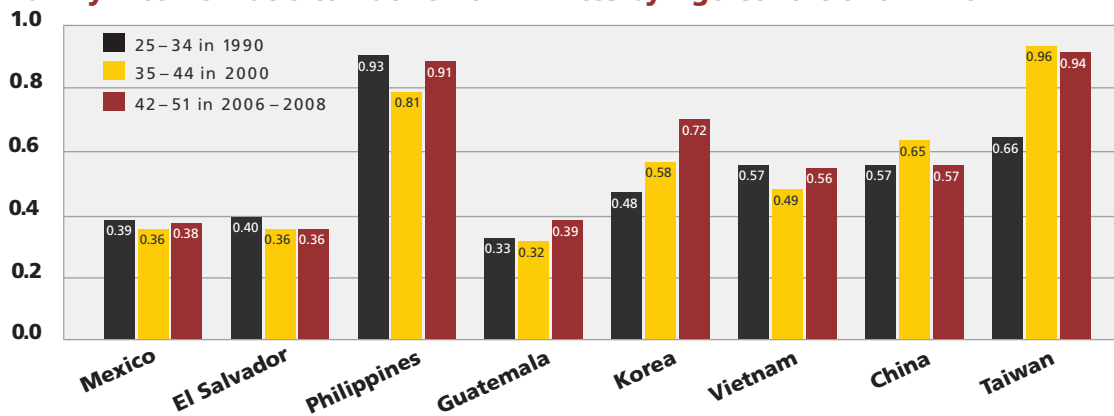


Family Income: Progress in Integration

Income gaps show little change

All the major immigrant groups and the native-born whites had income gains between 1990 and 2006–2008, and the end result was that little shifting or change took place in the relative incomes of immigrants to the native-born white comparison group.¹² The ratio of immigrant to native-born white income in 2006–2008 was close to the ratio in 1990 for five of the major immigrant groups. Immigrants from Guatemala, Korea and Taiwan were the exceptions. Income of the Korean cohort reached 72 percent of white income by 2006–2008, compared to 48 percent in 1990, and income of the Taiwanese cohort nearly reached parity with white income (at 94 percent) although Taiwanese income was only two-thirds of white income in 1990.

Family Income: Ratio to Native-Born Whites by Age Cohort Over Time



¹² See footnote 1 for note on how immigrant poverty rates can improve against native-born white poverty rates even while immigrant income levels may fall against income of whites.

Discussion

The foregoing analysis of eight major immigrant groups over three time periods presents many data points and challenges easy observations. However, the populations analyzed are large and representative of immigration to Los Angeles, and the metrics of education, poverty, income, and other outcomes are indisputably important for gauging progress. Countless government programs, for example, are based on the same poverty measure employed here, and academic research avails itself of the same measures.

It is good news for Los Angeles County that so many groups in so many instances saw their social and economic situation improve over the last decades. Education levels are up for nearly each group while poverty has fallen and inflation-adjusted incomes have risen. Mexican immigrants, for example, saw home ownership levels rise dramatically, Salvadoran immigrants saw their poverty levels cut by 13 percentage points, and Korean immigrants raised their education levels dramatically. There is undoubtedly progress in immigrant integration within Los Angeles, the nation's laboratory for the incorporation of new Americans. These facts are important because they contradict the facile notion that immigrants are part of an underclass and constitute a drag on society.

The immigrant groups have also made substantial strides in beginning to catch up to the native born according to most of the indicators analyzed. A salient trend is the sharp drop in immigrant poverty levels that contrasts with growing poverty among natives. Guatemalan immigrants in this report, for example, had a poverty rate that was almost seven times greater than the native-born white poverty rate in 1990; by the end of the study period, Guatemalans were only three times more likely to be in poverty.

Other findings are cause for some concern about the pace of immigrant integration. Only a small portion of some of the largest immigrant groups in L.A. County have a college degree, for example. About 4 percent of the Mexican immigrants of the 1980s (aged 25 to 34 as of 1990) had a college degree; after nearly two decades later, the percentage in that cohort had risen to only 5.4.¹³

A positive trend that may prove difficult to maintain is the climb in immigrant home ownership reported here. The increase has been dramatic up until the 2006–2008 period, but may not be sustainable due to the mortgage crisis. A recent report by the Center for Responsible Lending looked at (immigrant and native) homeowners and found that 17 percent of Latinos compared to only 7 percent of non-Latino Whites “have lost or are at imminent risk of losing their home.”¹⁴ ITIN-based mortgages may have facilitated home purchases by immigrants but also placed many immigrants into sub-prime lending.¹⁵

Few immigrant groups in this report made strides in narrowing the family income gap between themselves and native-born whites (the exceptions were notably Koreans and Taiwanese, and to a lesser extent Guatemalans). This report does not investigate the cause of this, but notable limits on immigrant

¹³ The low and persistent rate of college attainment may testify to the difficulty any adult faces in returning to school. But it may be misleading to expect all immigrants to have and or obtain high levels of education. Some forty percent of all jobs created in the U.S. require only short-term, on-the-job training, and Mexican immigrants are a de facto supply of workers for these jobs. Explicitly recognizing Mexican immigration's role in filling low-skill jobs—and providing legal migration visas for that labor stream—is a core feature of comprehensive immigration reform.

¹⁴ Gruenstein Bocian, Debbie; Li, Wei; and Ernst, Keith, 2010, *Foreclosures by Race and Ethnicity: the Demographics of a Crisis*, Oakland, CA: Center for Responsible Lending, accessed 10-18-10 at <http://www.responsiblelending.org/mortgage-lending/research-analysis/foreclosures-by-race-and-ethnicity.html>.

¹⁵ Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINS) issued by the Internal Revenue Service have been used by unauthorized immigrants as legal identification for purposes of securing a mortgage.

income growth include lack of English, specific occupational skills, certification, legal status, familiarity with the labor market or combinations of these and other factors. For the other groups, their income levels vis-à-vis native-born whites were more or less stagnant. This trend is disappointing because, at the end of the day, income purchases opportunity (e.g., education) and security (e.g., home ownership), and one would hope to see gaps in access to these items diminish.

These trends may point to a direction that philanthropic entities may consider in promoting and sustaining immigrant integration. This would embrace a set of goals and activities that foundations and others can engage in with legitimate expectations of success. Ensuring economic security means allowing immigrants to acquire needed workplace skills. This includes English language ability, so crucial to economic progress, that can be obtained via adult education classes. It includes workforce training to help workers move from healthcare aide to nurse, from construction laborer to skilled carpenter or electrician. It would involve support for institutions such as community colleges and not-for-profits to reach immigrants, enroll them and provide them with opportunities. These organizations may need support to orient themselves toward the needs of immigrants, such as by becoming culturally competent to effectively serve immigrants, and by making strategic decisions to target immigrants for service.

Another facet of supporting immigrant economic integration involves leveling the playing field in terms of public policies. Ensuring that immigrants have access to public programs like food stamps or medical care may not raise their household income but it improves their bottom line and prevents current gaps from widening. Ensuring equitable access to public safety net programs involves advocacy at the federal, state and local levels to promote immigrant eligibility but also to ensure that the programs exist in more or less their current state and are not weakened or eliminated.

In promoting public policy that supports integration of immigrant communities, foundations and other entities should recognize the implicit diversity of needs among the populations profiled in this report. Highly educated immigrants (like those from the Philippines reviewed in this study) may benefit from assistance in re-credentialing their professional certification earned abroad. Lower-skill groups for whom few avenues of legal immigration exist—but for whom large numbers of jobs have been created—have a more critical need for immigration reform. Groups with substantial investment in the local retail trade such as Koreans might best be supported with policies friendly to small business owners. Thus a comprehensive immigrant integration strategy for a region like Los Angeles will not be achieved with “one size fits all” solutions but rather with multi-tiered goals tied to the needs of the major populations.

Appendix

As noted in the Methodology section, L.A. County, the state of California and the U.S. all had aggregate declines in reported labor force participation in the 2000 census compared to the 1990 census. The 2006–2008 American Community Survey reported an increase over levels captured in the 2000 census.

Survey Construction and Comparability Issues

Some of the change in labor force participation may be due to shortcomings in survey questionnaires or lack of comparability among survey instruments across time. The Census Bureau found that the 2000 census undercounted persons in the labor force as compared to the Current Population Survey for the same year. (Unfortunately, the Bureau did not compare 1990 census findings to 1990 CPS results.) Furthermore, the 2000 census had a change in wording in the “work last week” question that may affect comparability with 1990 census.¹⁶

The American Community Survey (ACS) is the source of data in this report for the period 2006–2008. According to the Census Bureau, findings from the ACS are not exactly comparable to those of the Current Population Survey. The former includes, for example, non-institutionalized group quarter residents while the CPS is a survey of household members.¹⁷

Finally, the 2008 ACS changed the employment status questions that had been used in earlier ACS years. This was done to achieve ACS results that were more comparable to both the Current Population Survey findings and the estimates released by the Local Area Unemployment Statistics programs of the Census Bureau.¹⁸ As a result, comparisons of the 2008 ACS findings to the 2006 and 2007 ACS should be done with some caution.

Trends by Gender and Race

We examined labor force participation rates by gender, race and age in Los Angeles County to assess the potential impact of these characteristics on the drop in labor force participation in year 2000. (For example, if a large cohort of females in Los Angeles County entered childbearing years in 2000, that could perhaps affect job-seeking and employment.) The tabulation on the next page, however, shows that both males and females had a comparable dip in labor participation in the 2000 period. Another tabulation, also on the next page, shows that all races had a similar pattern across the survey years.

¹⁶ Palumbo, Thomas and Siegel, Paul, 2004, U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Economic Statistics Division “Accuracy of Data for Employment Status as Measured by the CPS-Census 2000 Match” (Census 2000 Evaluation B.7 report, available October 14, 2010 at <http://www.census.gov/pred/www/rpts/B.7%20Final%20Report.pdf>).

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau “Differences Among the Employment and Unemployment Estimates from the American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey, and the Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program” accessed October 14, 2010 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/researchnote092209.htm>

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau “Changes to the American Community Survey between 2007 and 2008 and the Effect on the Estimates of Employment and Unemployment” accessed October 14, 2010 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/researchnote092209.html>

Labor Force Participation Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Survey Period: Los Angeles County

	1990	2000	2006-2008
Male	77.3%	68.0%	73.1%
Female	55.5%	53.3%	57.0%

Source: 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses; 2006-2008 American Community Survey

Labor Force Participation Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Survey Period: Los Angeles County

	1990	2000	2006-2008
White not Latino	67.2%	63.7%	63.7%
Latino	69.0%	58.3%	67.3%
Black not Latino	62.4%	58.7%	60.8%
Asian not Latino	66.4%	59.0%	62.6%
Other not Latino	68.8%	62.0%	64.6%

Rob Paral and Associates help service organizations, charitable foundations and other institutions understand the populations they serve and the impact of their programs.

Our recent immigration-related projects include:

- Assessing the extent of services to immigrants in Illinois community colleges for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
- Developing measures of immigrant civic engagement for The Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Producing a three-part series of briefings on immigration and unemployment for the Washington, DC-based American Immigration Council

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