

***Job and Immigration Trends in New York's Largest Borough:
The Foreign-born Female Labor Force of Queens, 1996–2009***

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sector towards health services and child care that employ large numbers of women. These statistics challenge the outdated notion of the typical new immigrant to the city being a young male⁶.

After a surge in the percentage of Queens women who were foreign born in the late 1990s (See Figure 1), this number has fluctuated in the range of 49% to 55% in this decade. In 2008, the last year for which such information is available, this number stood at 54.6%, the largest ratio on record for Queens. This decade's relative stability of the immigrant-to-total female population should not de-emphasize the significant increase in this ratio from 1996⁷, the beginning of our sample, when this number stood at less than 39%.

Breaking down the immigrant female population by country of birth, we find two striking changes over the period 1996-2008; i) China has replaced the Dominican Republic over the last 12 years as the largest source of the immigrant female population of Queens and ii) The Bangladeshi female population has had a tremendous surge during this period, increasing more than three-fold in twelve years (See Figure 2).

While our sample begins in 1996, the Dominican Republic had consistently been the largest source of immigration to the city in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. From 1990 to 1996, there were 150,000 legal entries from the Dominican Republic (as well as substantial immigration from other Caribbean countries)⁸ while China contributed 83,540 entries during the same period, coming in third behind countries in the former USSR. It is also interesting to note the distinct settlement patterns of different immigrant groups in the City's boroughs. While immigrants from the Dominican Republic settle primarily in Manhattan and the Bronx with Queens a distant third destination area, Chinese immigrants split somewhat evenly between the boroughs of Manhattan and Queens⁹.

The rise of Bangladesh as a prominent country of origin for Queens women is starkly evident in Figure 2. In the years 1996 -1999, Bangladesh ranked 21st in the size of its immigrant population contribution; from 2006-2008, this rank had moved up to 6th, as this population has more than tripled in size.

The Ethnic/Racial composition of the Queens female population broken down by immigrant or native status is provided in Figure 3 for the years 1996-1998 and 2006-2008. The eight main subpopulations we consider are divided into two broad categories, native-born and foreign-born. Each of these two categories is further divided into four subgroups: non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, Asians and Hispanics. For example, the label "NBH" and "FBH" in Figure 3 correspond to the population of native-born Hispanics and foreign-born Hispanics, respectively¹⁰.

The most pronounced trend we find over the last 13 years is the decline in the native born populations, except that of Asians. The outmigration of native-born whites from the City to the suburbs as well as other states has been well documented over the decades, and zooming in on the female population of Queens, we recognize the same pattern in this demographic. The decline in numbers of native-born blacks in the city and in their employment is a relatively more recent phenomenon, starting around the mid-1990s.¹¹ Native-born Hispanics have experienced a similar dwindling of their numbers. The notable rise in the foreign-born Asian

and black populations, with other immigrant groups holding steady over this time all tell us a story of a “churning” borough in an even more dynamic city.

Labor Force Participation Rates

A look at the Labor Force Participation Rates of Queens women reveal some interesting contrasts between native and foreign-born women. We use the data for the three years spanning 2006 to 2008 to approximate the most recent conditions with an adequately large sample size. Interestingly, the difference between the labor force participation rates between the two populations (with native-born women participating at higher rates) is not highly significant in the overall picture. However, a closer look at this comparison by age group reveals a large gap between participation rates for women aged between 25 and 44 (see Figure 4).

Since it is this age group that exhibits a large chasm in participation rates, we take a closer look at the trend in this difference as well as its possible sources. As Figure 5 illustrates, the difference in participation rates has become considerably more pronounced over the last 13 years.

While the participation rate for immigrant women has decreased by 4 percent over the last 13 years, the corresponding rate for native-born women has increased by 8 percent. This divergent labor market behavior has more than doubled the difference in participation rates (from 8 to 20 percent) between the two groups over our period of analysis.

An individual’s choice to participate in the labor market is ultimately a household decision, and family dynamics along with demand side factors determine the likelihood and attractiveness of seeking employment. While traditional gender based roles in time allocation between work and family have slowly shifted to become more gender even, family considerations still substantially impact female labor supply decisions. Economists often attempt to estimate a “child-penalty” for women, the percentage point drop in the probability of being in the labor force due specifically to having a child. While we do not find a significant difference in the *proportion*

has replaced the Dominican Republic as the largest source of immigration within the borough's foreign-born female population. However, the most remarkable growth of an immigrant female population by country of birth has been from Bangladesh, which has more than tripled in size during the same period, moving up from 21st to the 6th largest immigrant group in the county. We also find that racial and ethnic demographics produce more recognizable patterns in the labor force participation rates of women as compared to the immigrant-nonimmigrant demarcation, which can further be traced to differences in marital status and presence of children. Finally, we find the slight differences in educational attainment and occupational distribution between native and immigrant women are not intense enough to produce any significant difference in wages for the two groups.

Figure 1: Foreign Born as Percentage of Total for Queens Women, 1996 – 2008

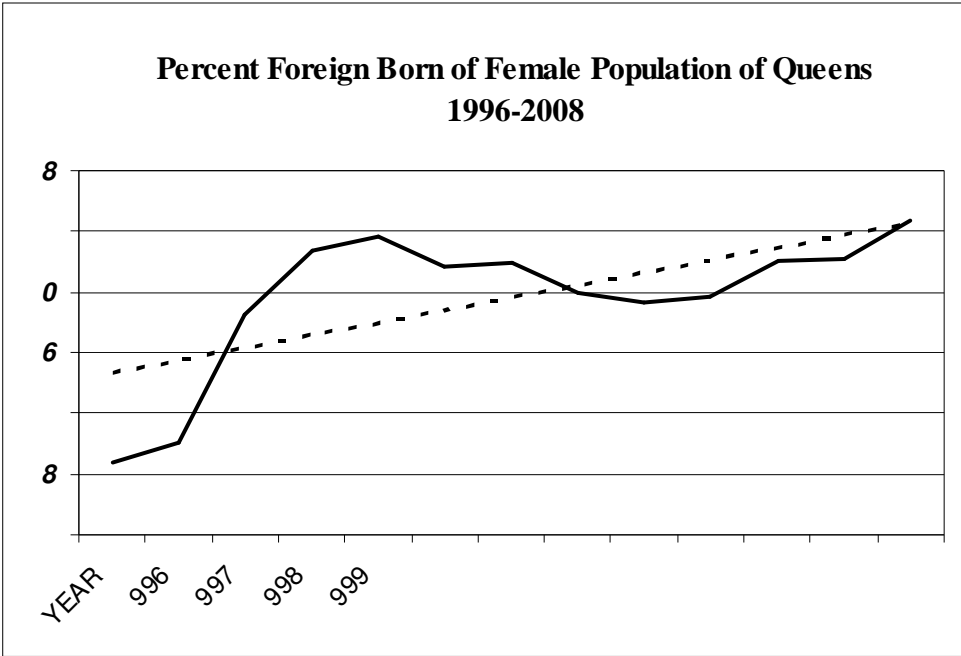


Figure 4: Labor Force Participation Rates by Age and Nativity, 2006 - 2008

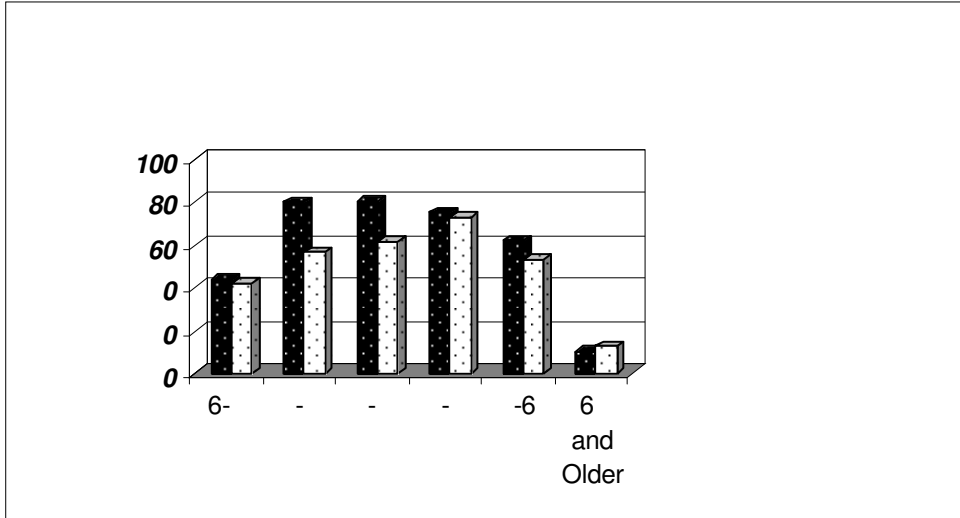


Figure 8: Hourly Wage for Native Born and Immigrant Women, 2008 dollars, 1996 – 2008

Table 1

Hourly Wage Earnings for Native and Foreign Born Women, 1996 - 2008

1996 - 1998	2006-2008
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NOTES

¹ Office of the NYC Comptroller, “New York City Recession Moderates,” *Economic Notes*, July 2009.

² NY State Dept. of Labor, Oct. 2009. These rates are not seasonally adjusted.

³ Dougherty, Conor and Miriam Jordan, “Recession Hits Immigrants Hard,” *Wall Street Journal*, 9/22/2009.

⁴ All estimates from Rosen, Wieler and Pereira, “New York city Immigrants: The 1990s Wave”, *Current Issues in Economics and Finance*, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, June 2005

⁵ See 2005 – 2007 American Community Survey Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

⁶ See Rosen, Wieler and Pereira, “New York city Immigrants: The 1990s Wave”.

⁷ Though the 1990s experienced overall job growth in New York City, the growth in employment starting in 1996 was much more dramatic than the earlier half of the decade. See Wright and Ellis, “Immigrants, the Native-Born, and the Changing Division of Labor in New York City” in “*New Immigrants in New York*”, Nancy Foner, Editor.

⁸ INS Statistics provided by the New York City Planning Office.

⁹ For a thorough discussion of settlement patterns from 1990 -1996 in New York City for the largest immigrant groups by country of birth See Kraly and Miyares, “Immigration to New York: Policy, Population and Patterns” in “*New Immigrants in New York*”.

¹⁰ Since the term “Native-Born” refers to those born in the U.S. and its territories, a person born in Puerto Rico is considered to be Native-Born Hispanic (NBH).

¹¹ See Wright and Ellis, “Immigrants, the Native-Born, and the Changing Division of Labor in New York City” in “*New Immigrants in New York*”.

¹² The hourly wage does not include overtime, tips and commission (OTTC) and can thus lead to an undercount of the actual hourly earnings. However, earlier studies at the national level find that imputing a wage for these workers by dividing weekly earnings by hours worked result in implausible negative estimates of OTTC (See *State of Working America 2005*, Economic Policy Institute 2005). We found this to be the case for regional level data as well.

¹³ Values of the Pareto imputed means and the STATA code to estimate them generally are available on request from the author.

Figure 1: Foreign Born as Percentage of Total for Queens Women, 1996 – 2008

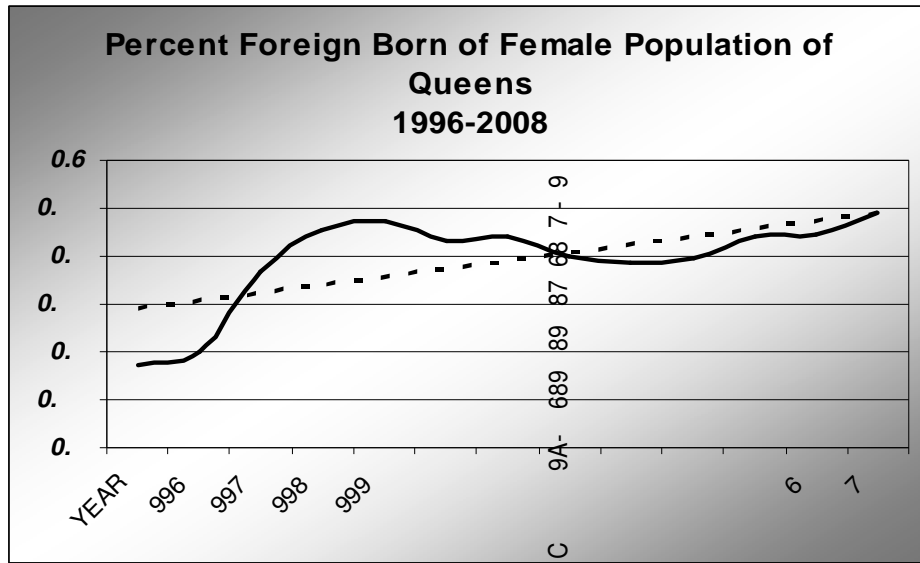


Figure 2: Foreign Born Women by Country of Birth, 1996 – 2008

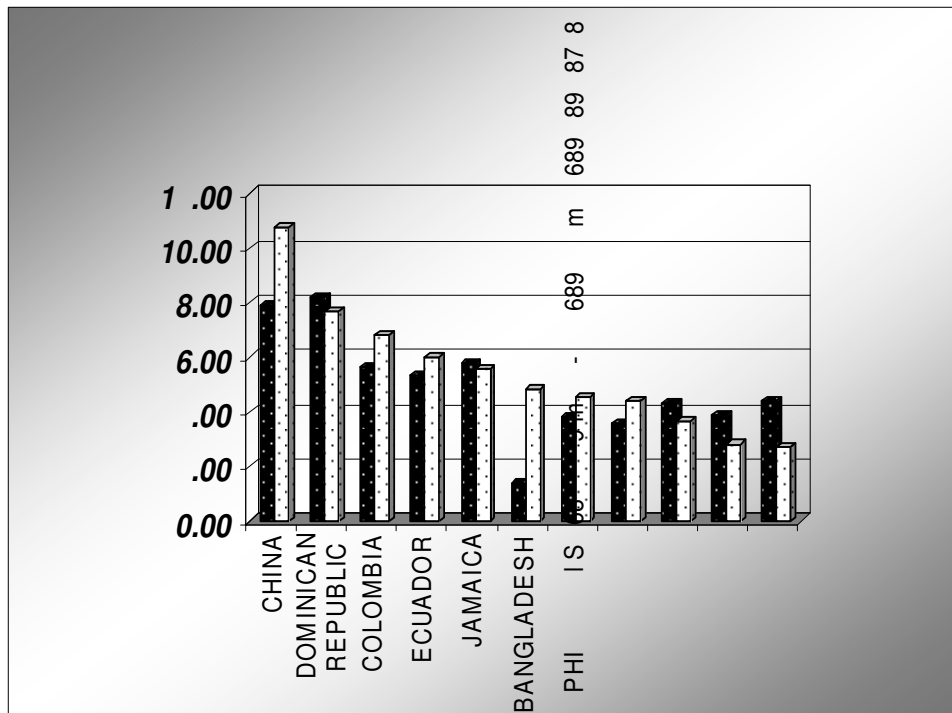


Figure 5: Labor Force Participation Rates by Nativity for Ages 25 - 44, 1996 to 2008

