

Immigrant Women in the United States: A Portrait of Demographic Diversity

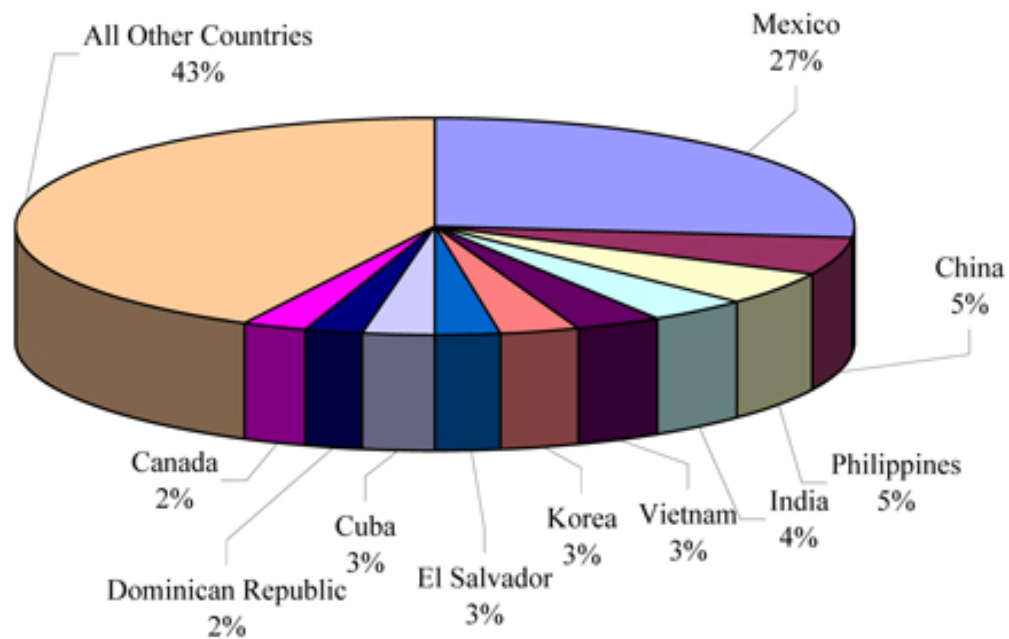
The 18.9 million immigrant women and girls in the United States in 2008 present a portrait of demographic diversity on many fronts. An analysis of Census Bureau data reveals that immigrant women are not easily categorized or stereotyped—and that many common myths about immigrants are shattered when we look carefully at the demographic diversity of these women.

For instance, while Mexico is the single largest country of origin for female immigrants—accounting for more than one-quarter of all foreign-born females—more than two-fifths of female immigrants come from countries other than those in the top ten. Female immigrants from Cuba and Canada have been here the longest and tend to be the oldest. At the other extreme, female immigrants from India, China, and Mexico have been here the shortest amount of time, while those from Mexico and India are the youngest. Nearly three-quarters of immigrant women from Vietnam are naturalized U.S. citizens, followed closely by those from the Philippines. Immigrant women from the Philippines are also the most likely to be in the labor force and the least likely to be in poverty. However, immigrant women from India rank the highest in terms of educational attainment, median income, and likelihood of employment in management and professional occupations. Both the labor-force participation rates and the educational attainment of immigrant women in the United States increased markedly between 2000 and 2008 for all top ten countries of origin. As these facts and figures illustrate, immigrant women play a diverse array of roles in the U.S. economy and society.

Mexico is the Single Largest Country of Origin for Female Immigrants

- Mexico accounted for more than one-quarter (27 percent) of all foreign-born females in 2008, followed by China and the Philippines at 5 percent each {Figure 1}.
- In a sign of their diverse range of national origins, more than two-fifths (or 43 percent) of foreign-born females came from countries other than the top 10 {Figure 1}.

Figure 1: Female Foreign-Born Population by Country of Origin, 2008

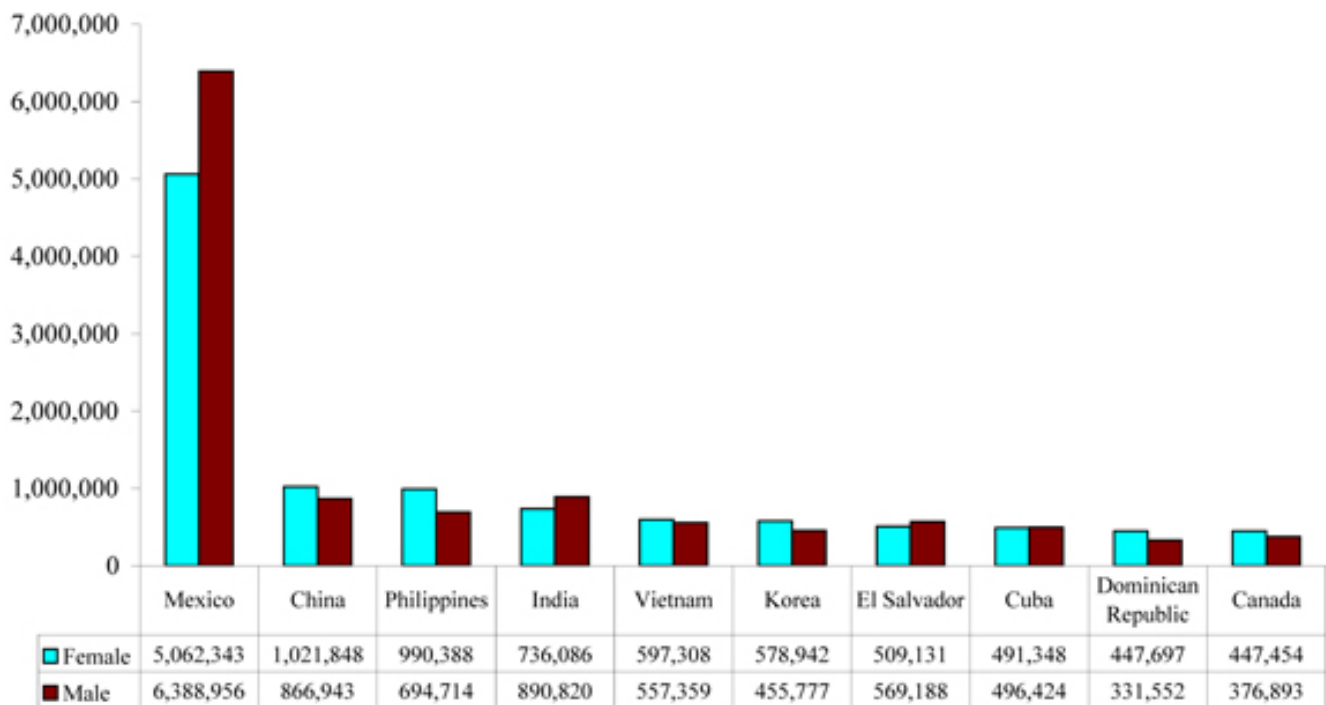


Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

Immigrant Males Slightly Outnumber Immigrant Females

- There were 18.9 million female immigrants in the United States in 2008, accounting for just under half (49.9 percent) of the total foreign-born population. In contrast, females accounted for slightly more than half (50.8 percent) of the native-born population.
- Immigrants accounted for 12.3 percent of the female population.
- Males significantly outnumbered females among immigrants from Mexico, and also predominated among immigrants from India and El Salvador {Figure 2}.
- Females predominated among immigrants from China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, the Dominican Republic, and Canada {Figure 2}.

Figure 2: Foreign-Born Population by Gender & Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008



Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

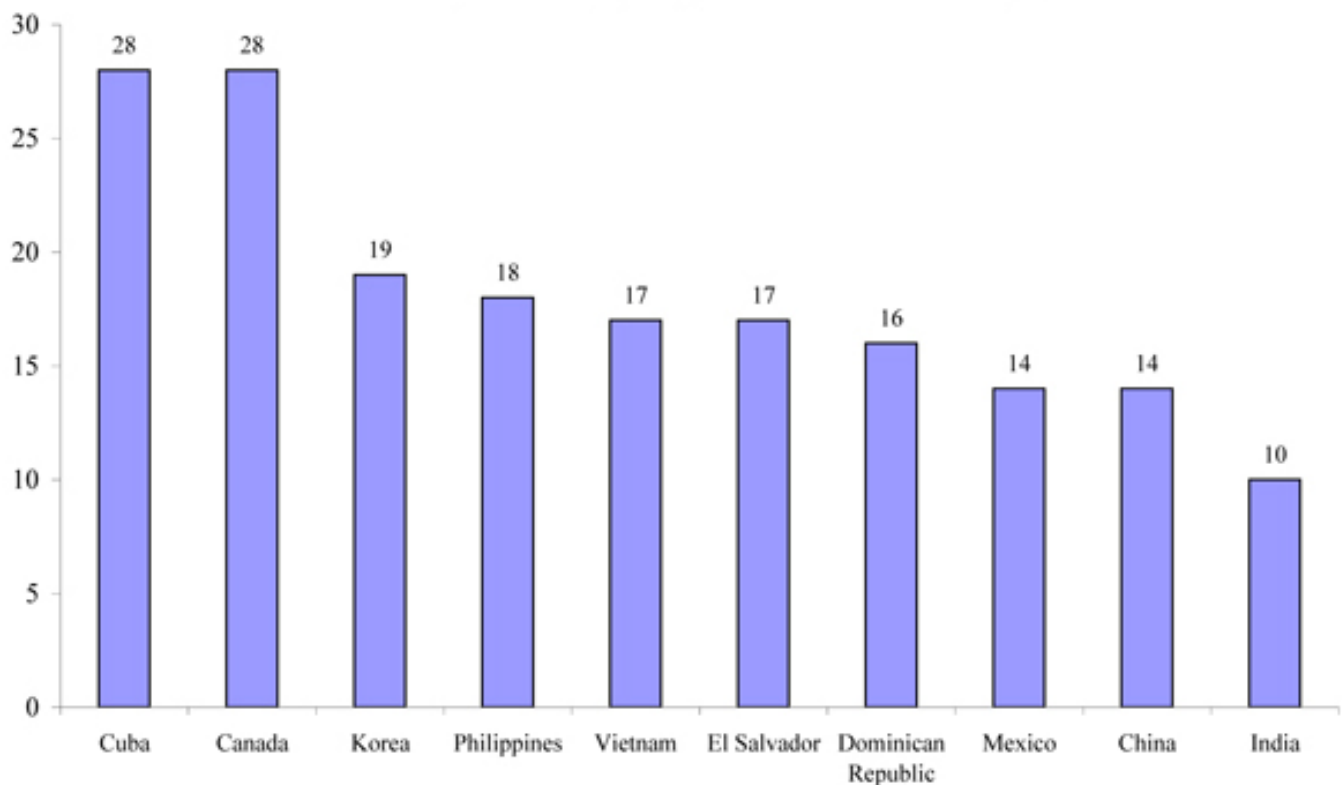
- According to the Migration Policy Institute, the female share of the foreign-born population has declined over the past three decades, from 53.4 percent in 1980, to 51.1 percent in 1990, to 50.2 percent in 2000, to 49.9 percent in 2008.[\[2\]](#)
- The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 4.1 million unauthorized-immigrant women comprised approximately 39 percent of the adult unauthorized population in the United States in 2008.[\[3\]](#)
- Data from the Department of Homeland Security indicate that female immigrants are more likely than male immigrants to come to the United States through the family-based immigration system, rather than the employment-based system.
- In Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, for instance, 112,694 females obtained legal permanent resident (LPR) status under family-based “preference” categories, compared to 99,165 males.
- In contrast, 74,563 men obtained LPR status under employment-based categories, compared to 69,471 women (many of whom did so as the spouses of principal LPR recipients).[\[4\]](#)

Immigrant Women from Cuba and Canada Have Been in the U.S. the Longest; Those from India, China, and Mexico the Shortest Amount of Time

- On average, foreign-born females had been in the United States for a median of 16 years as of 2008—compared to 15 years for foreign-born males.
- The median number of years spent in the United States among foreign-born females varied widely according to country of origin, ranging from only 10 years among those from India to 28 years among those from Cuba and Canada {Figure 3}.
- Female immigrants from Mexico and China both had been in the United States for a median

of 14 years as of 2008 {Figure 3}.

Figure 3: Median Number of Years in the United States for Foreign-Born Female Population, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008

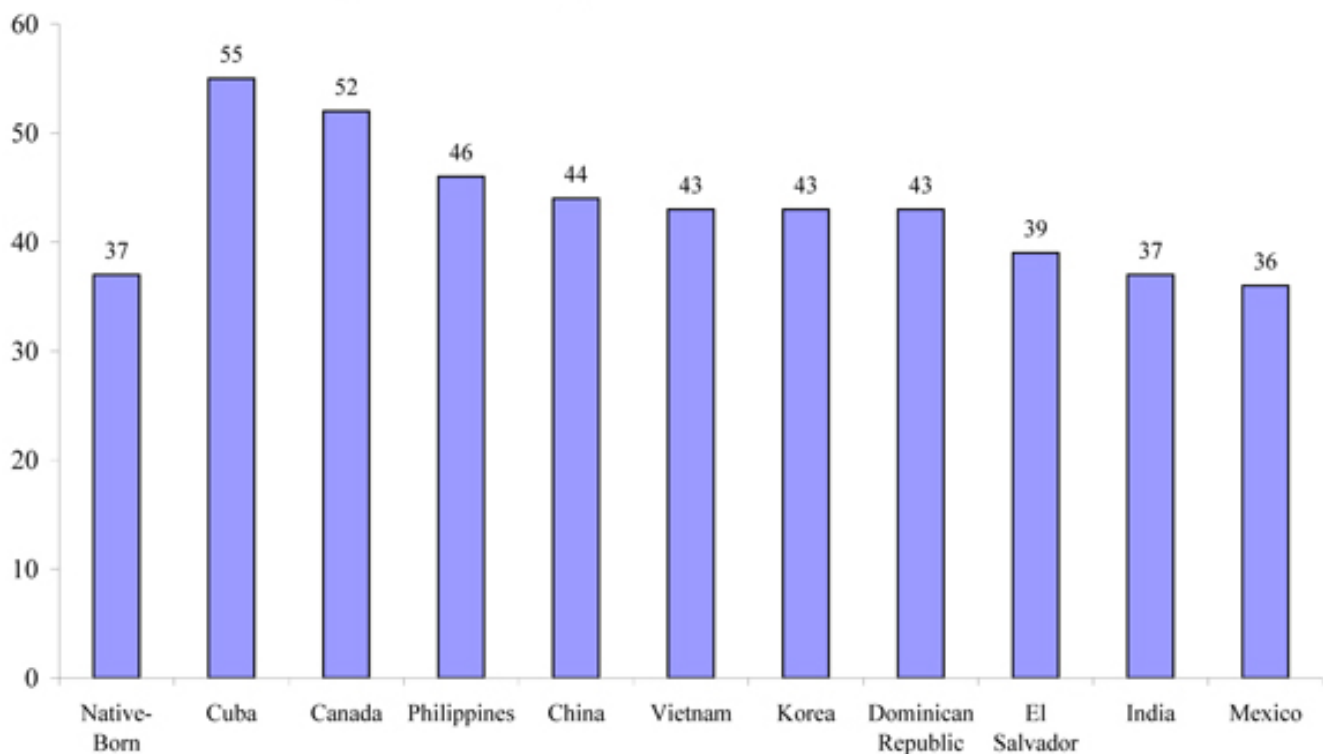


Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

Immigrant Females from Cuba and Canada Tend to be the Oldest; Those from Mexico and India the Youngest

- The median age of foreign-born females in 2008 was 42, compared to 37 for native-born females and 39 for foreign-born males.
- The median age of foreign-born females varied widely according to country of origin, ranging from 36 among those from Mexico to 55 among those from Cuba {Figure 4}.

Figure 4: Median Age of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Female Population, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008

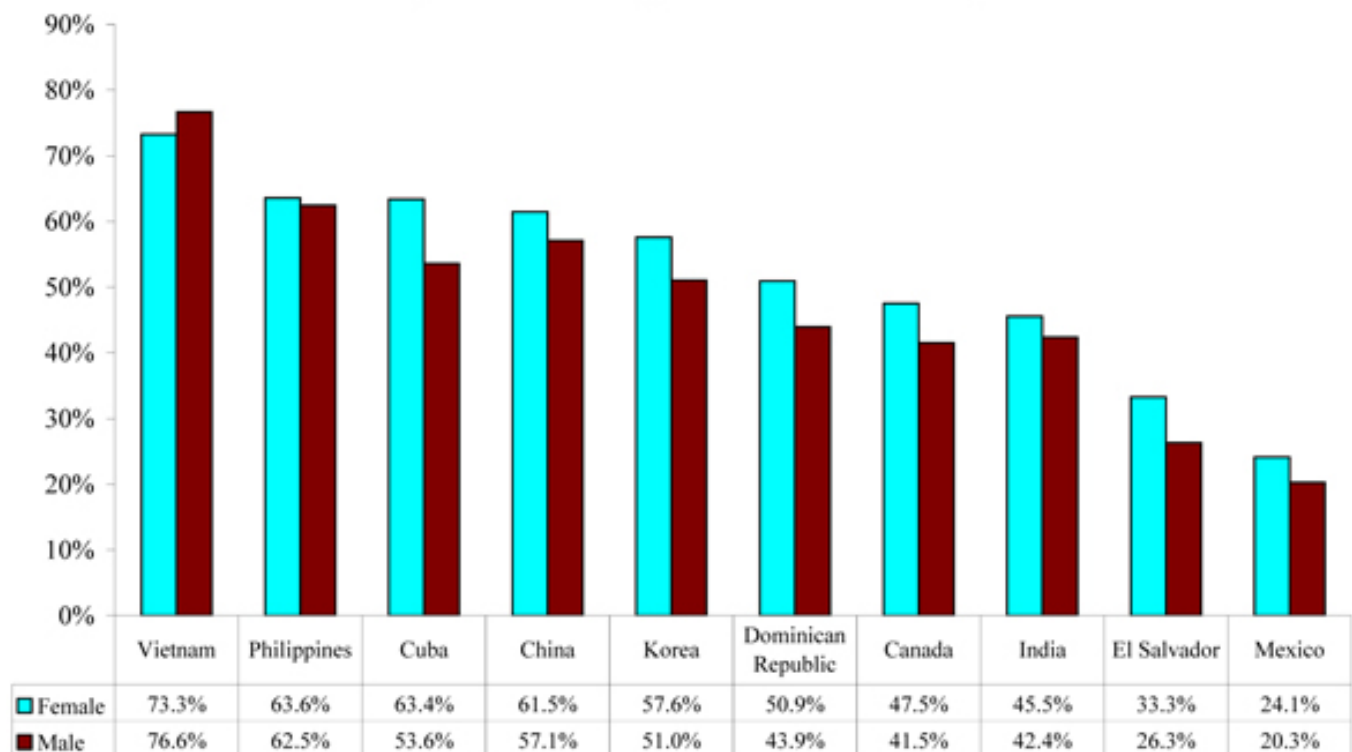


Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

Immigrant Women from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Cuba Have the Highest Naturalization Rates

- Nearly half (46.4 percent) of female immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2008, compared to 39.7 percent of male immigrants.
- Immigrant women were more likely to be naturalized U.S. citizens than immigrant men for nine out of the top 10 countries of origin {Figure 5}.
- Nearly three-quarters (73.3 percent) of Vietnamese immigrant women were naturalized U.S. citizens, as well as three-fifths of immigrant women from the Philippines, Cuba, and China {Figure 5}.

Figure 5: Share of Foreign-Born Persons Who Are Naturalized U.S. Citizens, by Gender & Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008

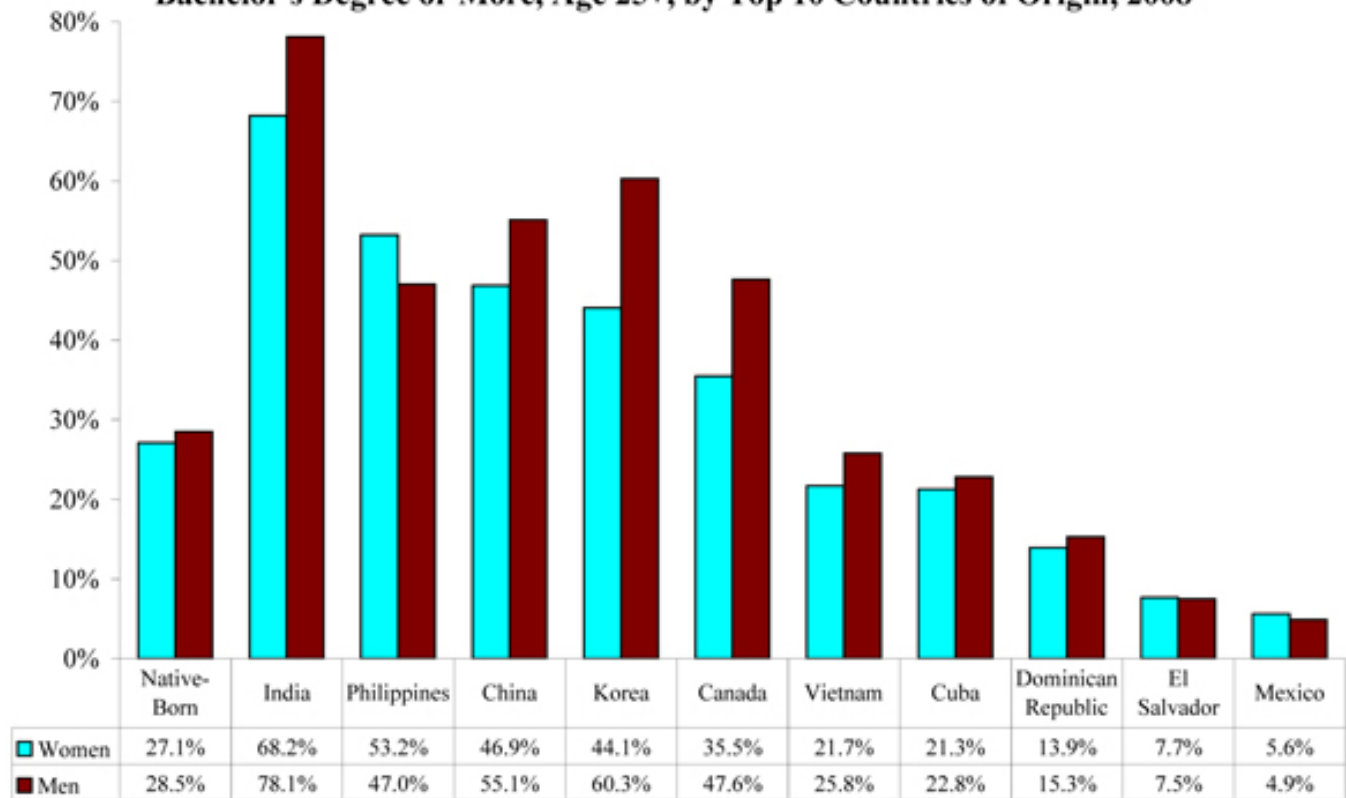


Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

Immigrant Women from India and the Philippines Are the Most Highly Educated

- Just over one-quarter (26.4 percent) of immigrant women had a bachelor's degree or more education in 2008, compared to 27.1 percent of native-born women and 27.9 percent of foreign-born men.
- The educational attainment of foreign-born women in 2008 varied widely according to country of origin. For instance, nearly seven out of ten immigrant women from India (68.2 percent) had a bachelor's degree or more education, compared to slightly more than one-quarter (27.1 percent) of native-born women and only one-in-twenty immigrant women from Mexico (5.6 percent) {Figure 6}.
- Immigrant women from El Salvador and Mexico were somewhat more likely to have a bachelor's degree or more education than their male counterparts. However, in the other eight top countries of origin, men were more likely than women to have graduated from college {Figure 6}.

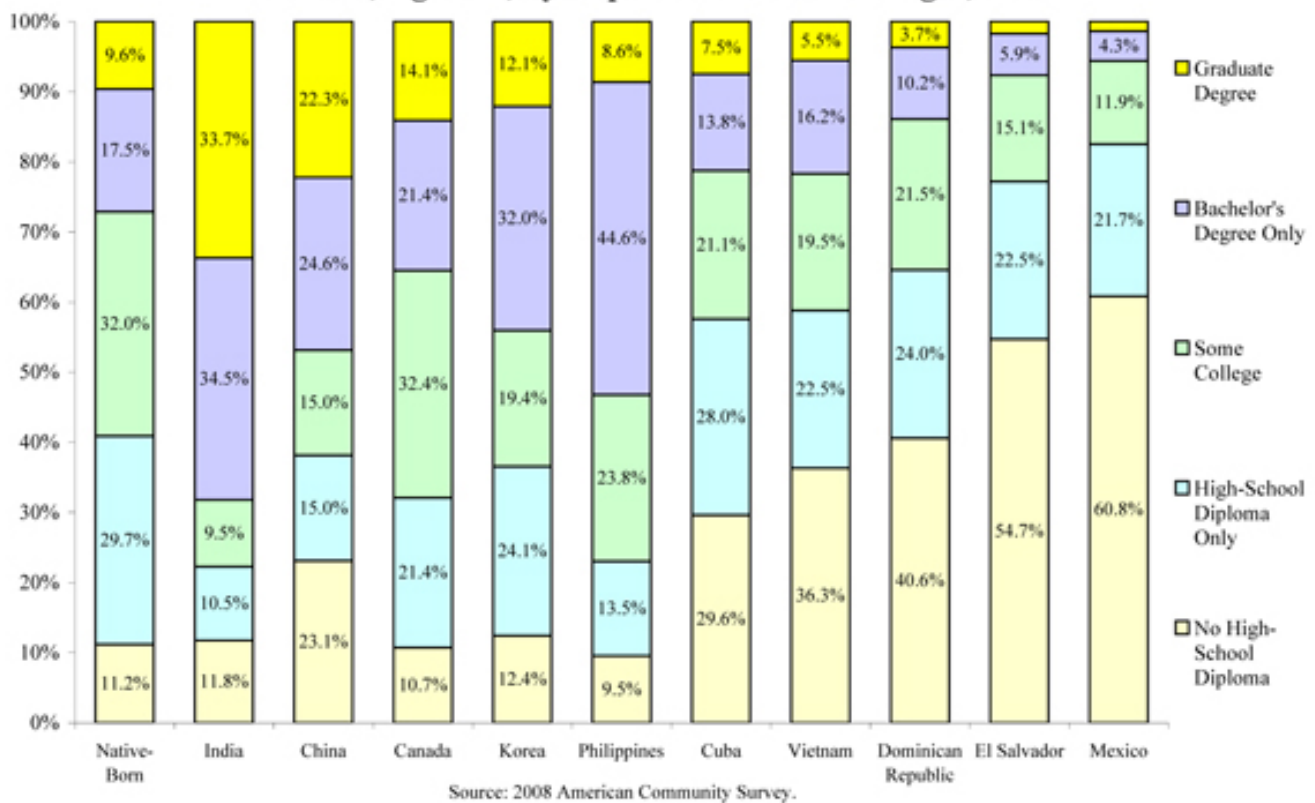
Figure 6: Share of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Women & Men with Bachelor's Degree or More, Age 25+, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008



2008 American Community Survey.

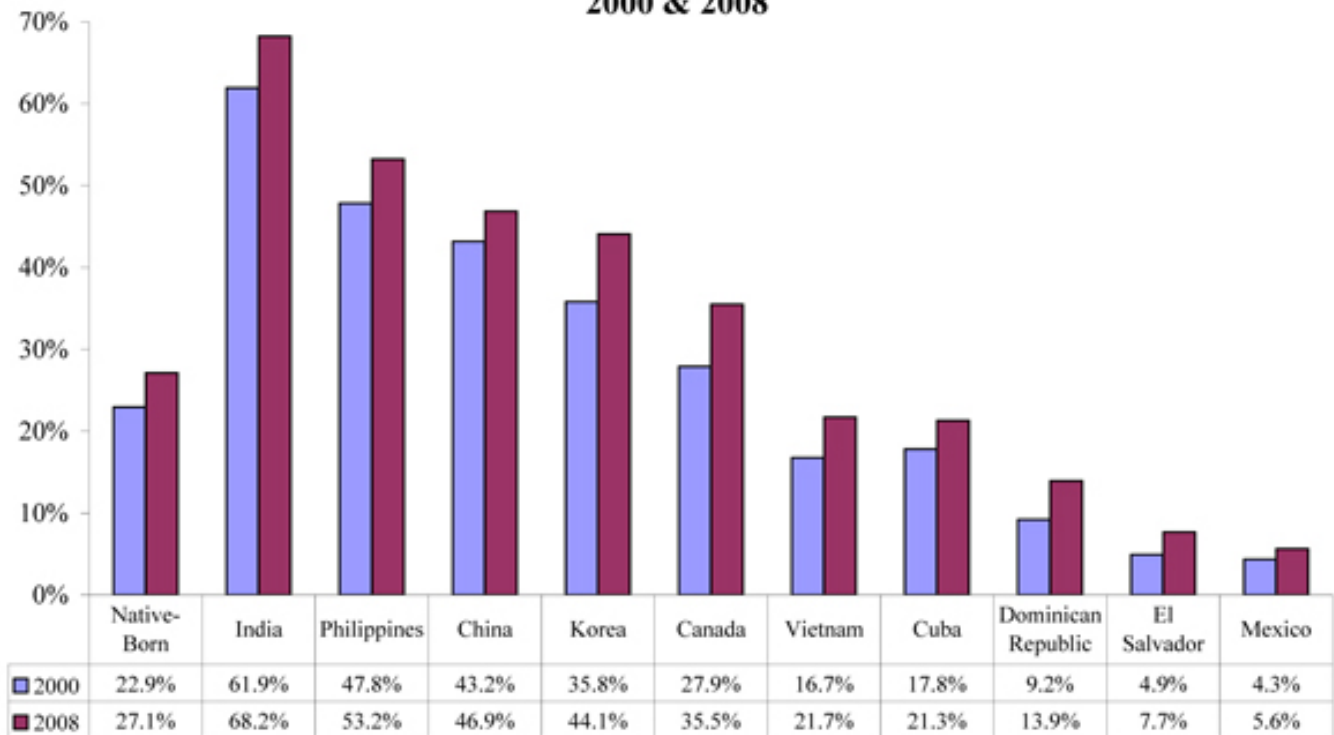
- In 2008, 9.5 percent of immigrant women had a graduate degree, compared to 9.6 percent of native-born women and 12.6 percent of foreign-born men.
- One-third of immigrant women from India (33.7 percent) had a graduate degree, compared to one-in-ten native-born women (9.6 percent) {Figure 7}.
- Three-fifths of immigrant women from Mexico (60.8 percent) lacked a high-school diploma, compared to roughly one-in-ten native-born women (11.2 percent) {Figure 7}.

Figure 7: Educational Attainment of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Women, Age 25+, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008



- The share of immigrant women with a bachelor's degree or more education increased from 22.1 percent in 2000 to 26.4 percent in 2008. The share of native-born women with a comparable level of education increased from 22.9 percent in 2000 to 27.1 percent in 2008.
- The share of immigrant women with a bachelor's degree or more education increased for all top 10 countries of origin between 2000 and 2008 {Figure 8}.

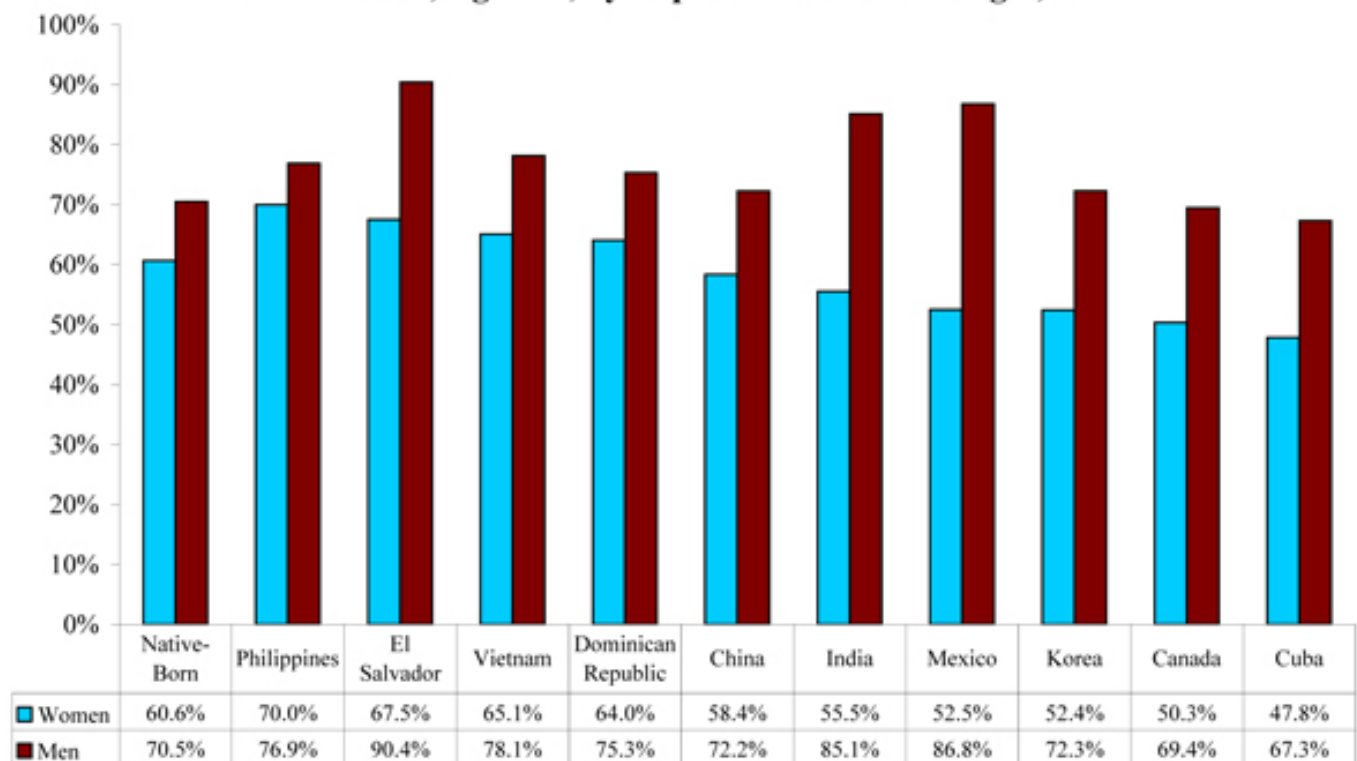
Figure 8: Share of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Women with Bachelor's Degree or More, Age 25+, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2000 & 2008



Immigrant Women from the Philippines and El Salvador Have the Highest Rates of Labor-Force Participation

- On average, 57.1 percent of foreign-born women were in the labor force in 2008, compared to 60.6 percent of native-born women and 80.6 percent of foreign-born men.
- Seven out of ten immigrant women from the Philippines (70.0 percent) were in the labor force, compared to three-fifths of native-born women (60.6 percent) {Figure 9}.
- Men had higher labor-force participation rates than women for all top 10 countries of origin {Figure 9}.

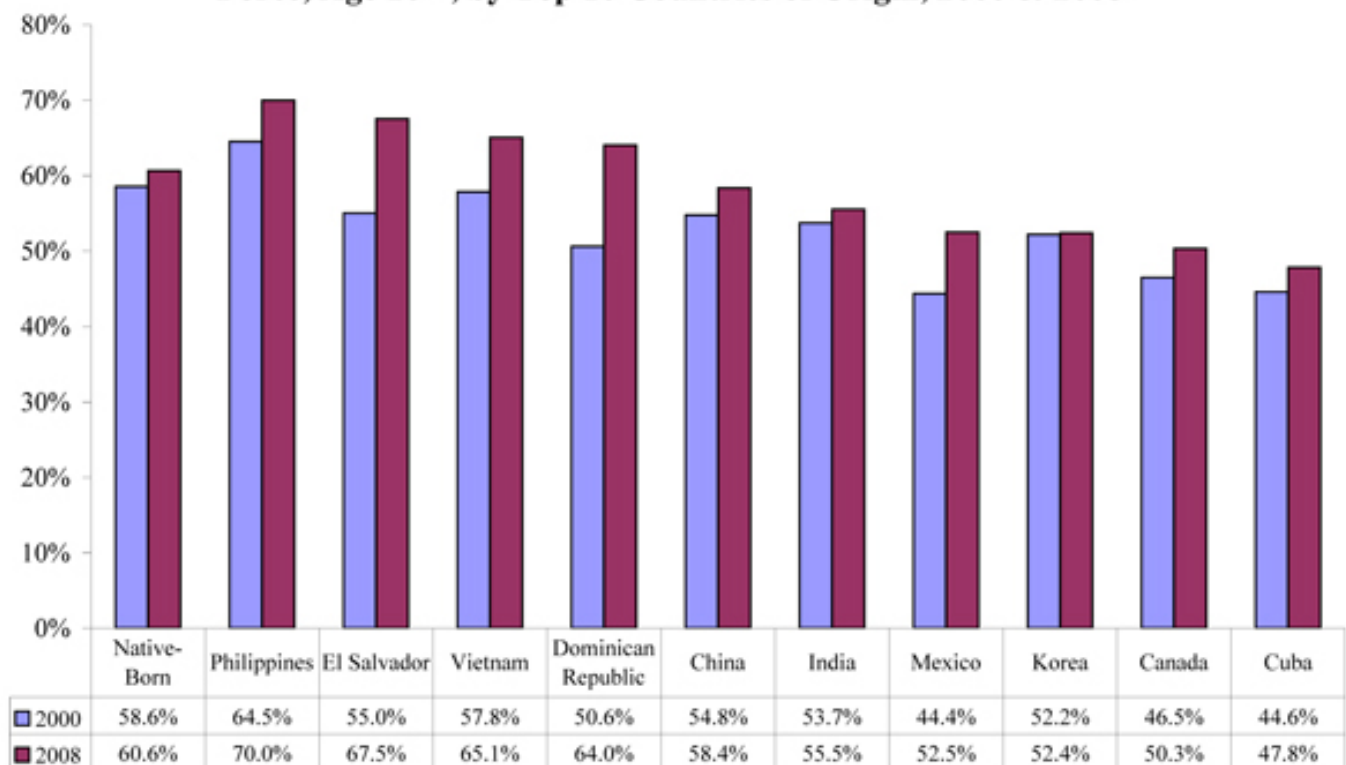
Figure 9: Share of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Women & Men in the Labor Force, Age 16+, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008



Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

- The labor-force participation rate of immigrant women rose from 50.5 percent in 2000 to 57.1 percent in 2008. By way of comparison, the labor-force participation rate of native-born women rose from 58.6 percent in 2000 to 60.6 percent in 2008.
- Labor-force participation rates increased among immigrant women from all top 10 countries of origin between 2000 and 2008 {Figure 10}.
- The largest increases in labor-force participation between 2000 and 2008 occurred among women from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Mexico {Figure 10}.

Figure 10: Share of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Women in the Labor Force, Age 16 +, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2000 & 2008

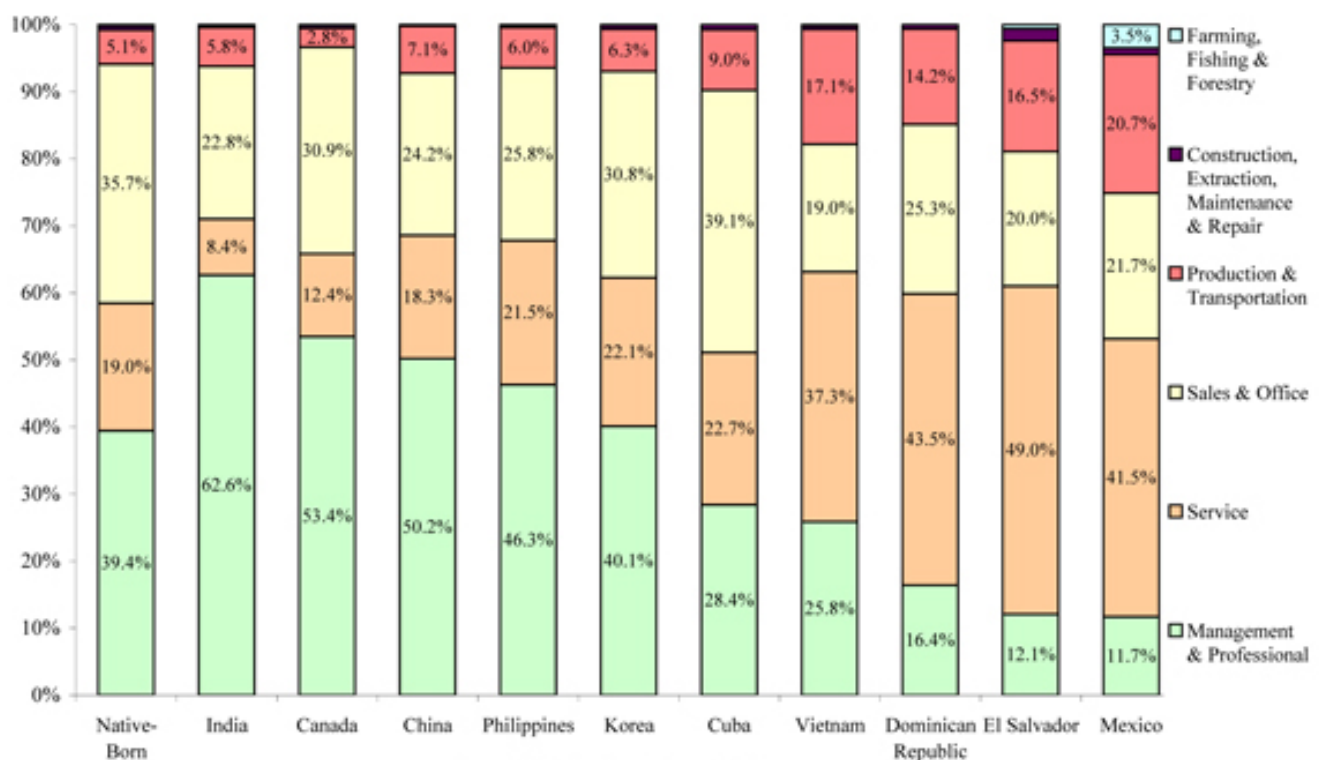


Source: 2000 Census & 2008 American Community Survey.

Immigrant Women from India and Canada Are the Most Likely to Work in Management & Professional Occupations

- Just under one-third (30.9 percent) of immigrant women in the labor force worked in management and professional occupations in 2008, while just under a third (31.1 percent) worked in service occupations, one quarter (25.3 percent) is sales and office occupations, and one-in-nine (11.1 percent) in production and transportation occupations.
- More than three-fifths of immigrant women from India who were in the labor force in 2008 worked in management and professional occupations (62.6 percent), compared to two-fifths of native-born women (39.4 percent) {Figure 11}.
- Nearly half of immigrant women from El Salvador who were in the labor force worked in service occupations (49.0 percent), compared to one-fifth of native-born women (19.0 percent) {Figure 11}.

Figure 11: Native-Born & Foreign-Born Women in the Labor Force, Age 16+, by Occupation, for Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008

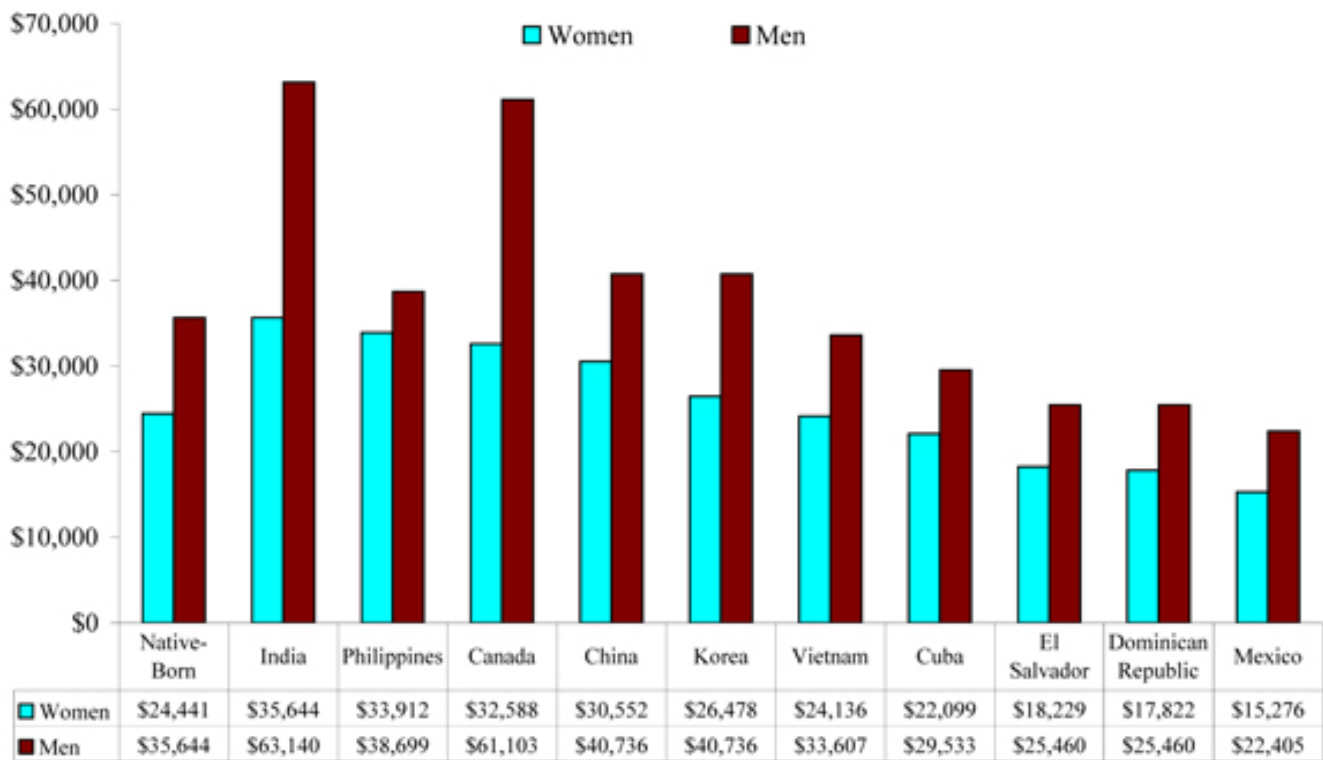


Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

Immigrant Women from India and the Philippines Have the Highest Median Incomes

- Immigrant women in the labor force had a median annual income of \$21,182 in 2008, compared to \$24,441 for native-born women and \$29,533 for foreign-born men.
- Immigrant women from India who were in the labor force had the highest median annual income (\$35,644), compared to \$24,441 for native-born women in the labor force {Figure 12}.
- Among all top 10 countries of origin, immigrant men in the labor force earned significantly more than immigrant women in the labor force {Figure 12}.

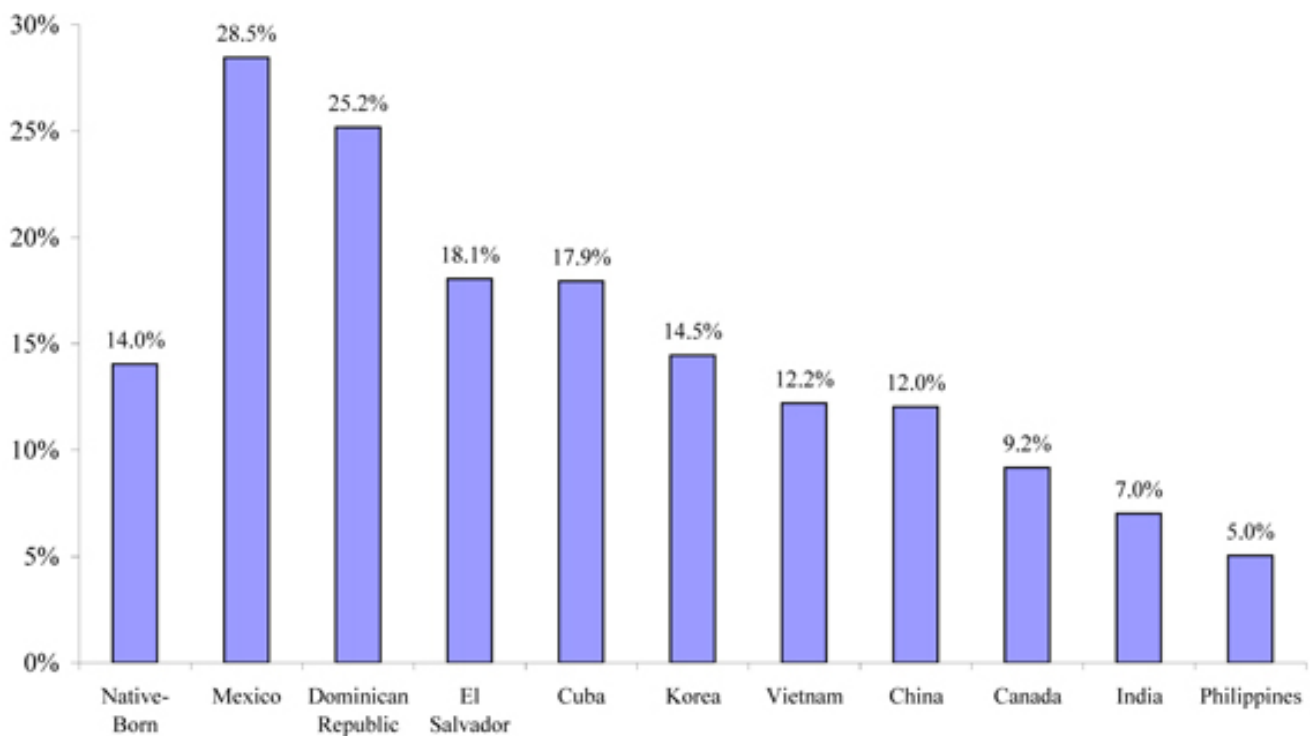
Figure 12: Median Income of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Women & Men in the Labor Force, Age 16+, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008



Female Immigrants from the Philippines and India Have the Lowest Poverty Rates

- On average, 17.5 percent of female immigrants lived below the poverty line in 2008, compared to 14.0 percent of native-born females and 14.3 percent of foreign-born males.
- Among the top 10 countries of origin, female immigrants from the Philippines had the lowest poverty rate in 2008 (5.0 percent) {Figure 13}.
- Female immigrants from Mexico had the highest poverty rate, at 28.5 percent, followed by female immigrants from the Dominican Republic and El Salvador {Figure 13}.

Figure 13: Share of Native-Born & Foreign-Born Female Population Living Below the Poverty Line, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008

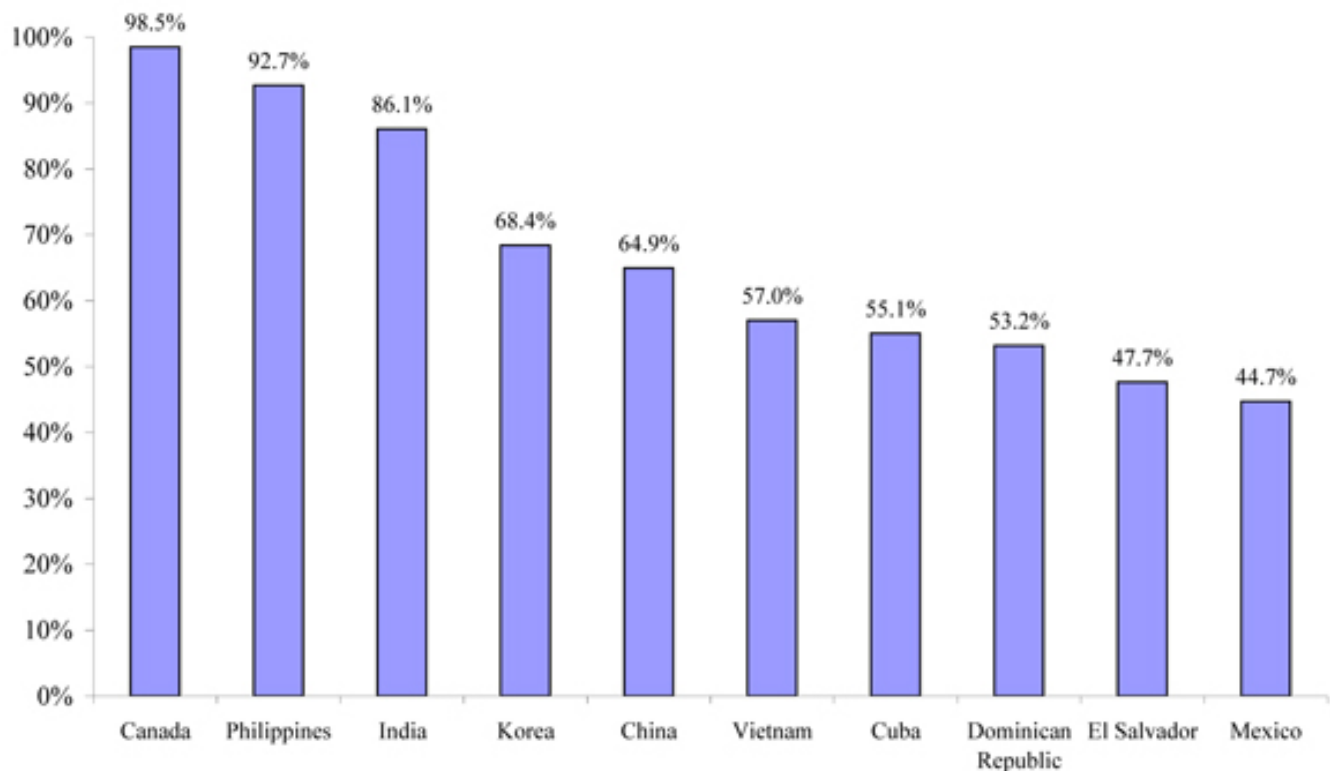


Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

Immigrant Females from Canada, the Philippines, and India Have the Highest Levels of English-Language Ability

- More than three-fifths (68 percent) of female immigrants spoke English “well” or better in 2008, compared to 69.7 percent of male immigrants.
- English-language ability varied widely by country of origin, ranging from 98.5% of female Canadian immigrants age 5+ who spoke English “well” or better to 44.7 percent of female Mexican immigrants {Figure 14}.
- Fewer than half of female immigrants from Mexico and El Salvador spoke English “well” or better in 2008 {Figure 14}.

Figure 14: Share of Female Foreign-Born Population, Age 5+, Who Speak English "Well" or Better, by Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2008



Source: 2008 American Community Survey.

Endnotes

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all data from 2008 are taken from the 2008 American Community Survey and all data from 2000 are from the 2000 Census. This data was provided to the IPC by [Rob Paral & Associates](#) [1].

[2] Aaron Terrazas and Jeanne Batalova, "[Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States](#) [2]," Migration Information Source, October 2009.

[3] Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) [3] (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009), p. 4.

[4] Office of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, *2009 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, [Table 9](#) [4].

Published On: **Mon, Jun 28, 2010** | [Download File](#) [5]

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[3] <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1190/portrait-unauthorized-immigrants-states>

[4] <http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/LPR09.shtm>

[5] http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Immigrant_Women_in_the_US_-_A_Portrait_of_Diversity_062810.pdf

