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Changing College Graduation Rates Among New York City's Latino Populations 1990 - 2020

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Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies

Changing College Graduation Rates Among New York City's Latino Populations 1990 - 2020

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The Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies is a research institute that works for the advancement of the study of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the United States in the doctoral programs at the CUNY Graduate Center. One of its major priorities is to provide funding and research opportunities to Latino students at the Ph.D. level.

The Latino Data Project was developed with the goal of making information available on the dynamically growing Latino population of the United States and especially New York City through the analysis of extant data available from a variety of sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Institute for Health, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and state and local-level data sources.

All Latino Data Project reports are available at <http://clacls.gc.cuny.edu>

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Executive Summary

The importance of a college education in determining the possibilities for upward social mobility and improved living standards is graphically underlined by examining income levels at different educational attainment levels. Latinos living in New York City in 2020 who had achieved a B.A. degree or higher earned median household incomes of \$107,721 compared with high school graduates whose median household incomes stood at \$61,879.

There were important differences in college graduation rates among the City's Latino population by sex, nativity, and nationality. Latinas of every nationality were the highest achievers, and this was especially the case if they were born in the United States. Among all Latinas 25 years of age and older living in New York City in 2020 and born in the U.S., nearly 32% had achieved a B.A. degree or higher compared with 24% of Latinos born in the U.S.

By way of comparison 15.5% of foreign-born Latinas had graduated college compared with 14.3% of Latinos.

There was a very clear hierarchy in college-degree educational attainment when the five largest Latino nationalities are examined, among both women and men. Colombian, Ecuadorian, and Mexican women born in the U.S. had college graduation rates well above 40%, while among Dominican women born in the U.S. about one-third had graduated college. Puerto Rican women born in the U.S. had the lowest college graduation rates at 23%. The data examined for this report do not permit a detailed analysis for the causes of these differentials. However, clearly these data suggest the need for a more all-inclusive research project.

Among males born in the U.S. every nationality examined has significantly lower college-graduation rates than among adult women. For Mexicans it was about 42%, the highest among Latino men of all nationalities born in the U.S. For Colombian U.S.-born males it was nearly 40%; among Ecuadorians the rate was 34%; for Dominican U.S.-born males it was 21%; and for Puerto Ricans the college graduation rate was 16%.

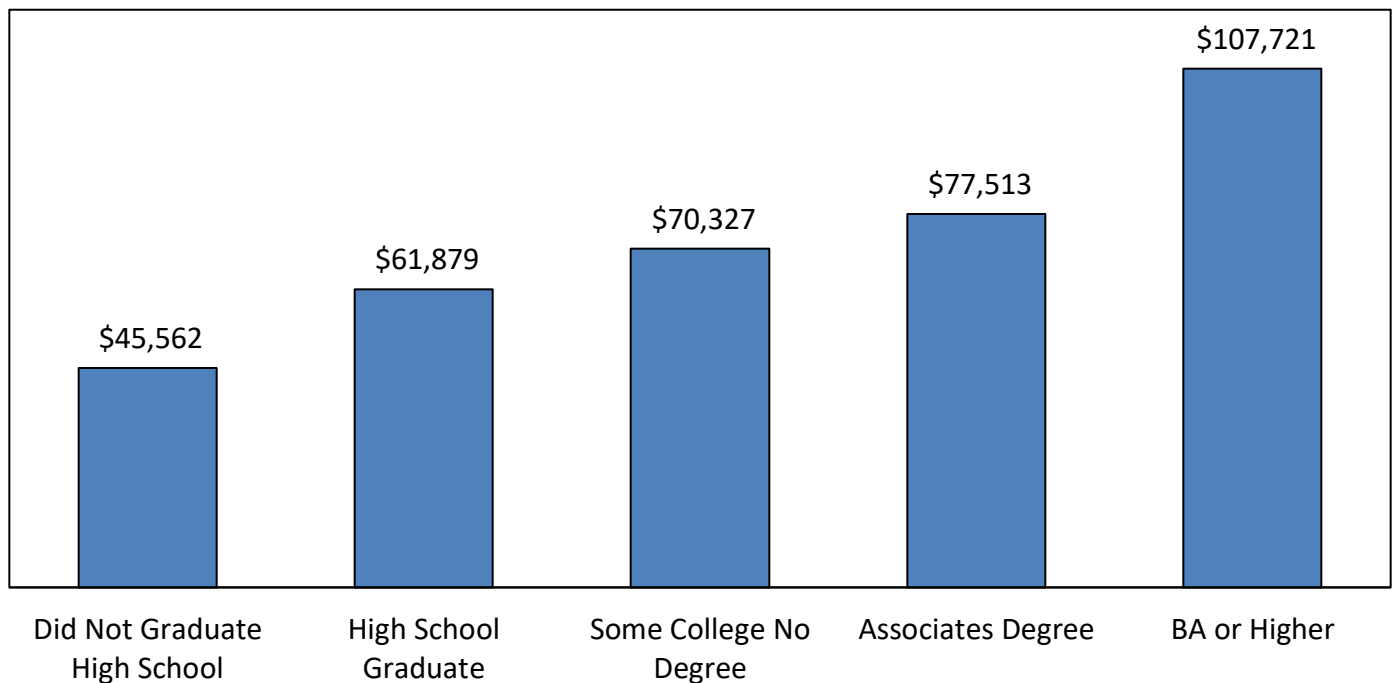
Although there are no data available it is very likely that New York City Latino populations who had achieved a B.A. degree or higher studied at various CUNY campuses. Among all undergraduates enrolled in all CUNY campuses 31% were of Hispanic origin in the Fall 2019 semester.¹ Over 52% of Lehman College's undergraduates were Latinos in the Fall 2019 semester; 45% of John Jay's; 34% of City College's undergraduates; and nearly or over 20% at Brooklyn, Hunter, Baruch, Queens, Staten Island, and York.

If there was ever an argument for increased funding for CUNY colleges, the income data alluded to above is a powerful argument supporting the critical need for financial aid to all students, not just Latinos.

¹ These and subsequent data on CUNY college enrollments were derived from "Total Enrollment by Undergraduate and Graduate Level, Race/Ethnicity and College: Percentages Fall 2019" available at http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/ENRL_0027_RACE_UGGR_PCT_HIST.rpt.pdf

There is little question that educational attainment levels are the most important factors determining income levels and living standards among New York City's Latino and all other population sectors. The importance of a college degree is graphically revealed in Figure 1 below.²

Figure 1
Median Household Income among Latino Populations of New York City
by Educational Attainment Level, 2020



This report examines changing college graduate rates between 1990 and 2020 among all Latinos in New York City and within the five largest population nationalities in 2020: Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Ecuadorians, and Colombians. These data are examined by sex and nativity because there were significant variations in the rates of college graduation among women and men and nativity.

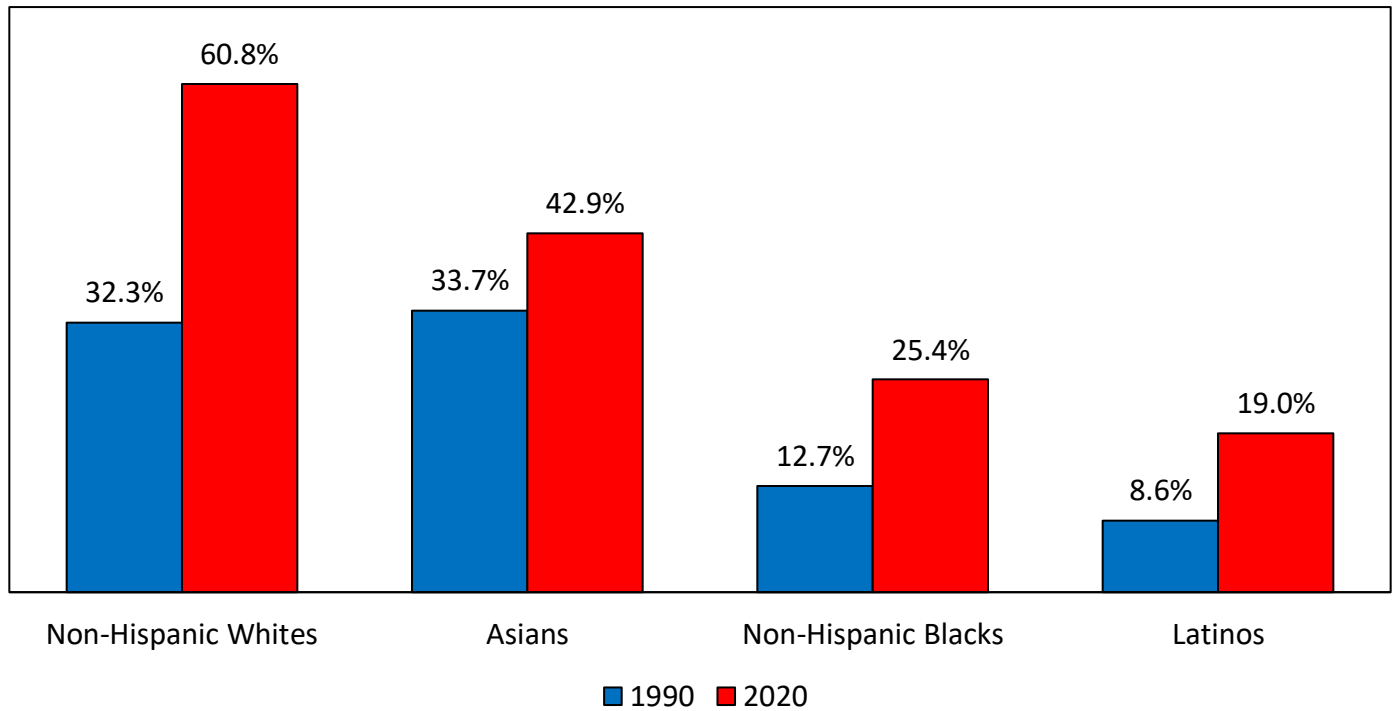
² All data in this report were derived from the 1990 and 2020 American Community Survey 5-year survey samples found at IPUMS USA found at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

See Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Megan Schouweiler and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 12.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V12.0>.

College graduation rates were calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau for the population 25 years of age and older and in this study include all people achieving a B.A. degree or higher educational attainment level.

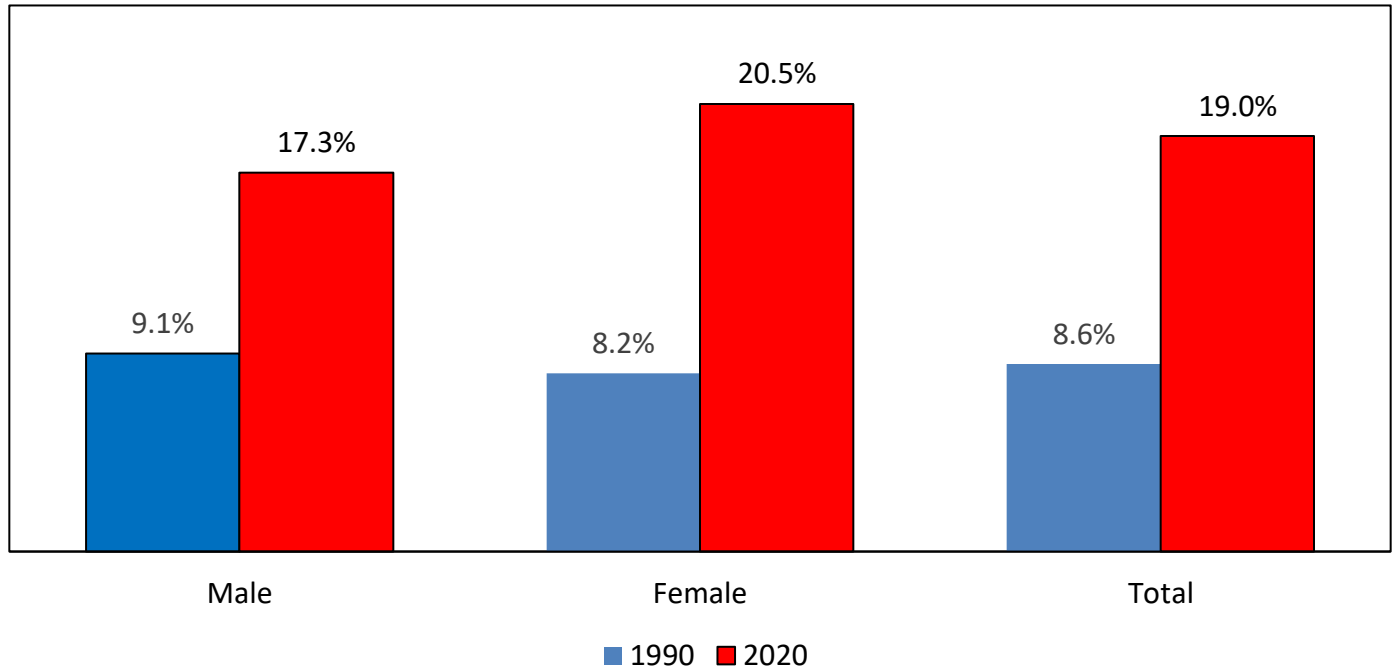
Latinos had the lowest college graduation rates among the four largest broadly based race/ethnic groups in New York City as indicated in Figure 2. However, there was a more than doubling that rate between 1990 and 2020 from 8.6% to 19.0% and that is very welcome news and a major sign of improvement.

Figure 2
College Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity New York City, 1990 - 2020



There were significant differences in college graduation rates among Latinos when sex and nativity are included in the analysis. In 2020 20.5% of New York City's adult Latina population had graduated college—a major increase from the 8.5% college graduation rate found in 1990. Latinos achieving a B.A. degree or higher comprised a significantly lower 17.3% of the City's 25 years and older male Latino population. But this was an improvement from the 9.1% of male Latino college graduates found in 1990. (See Figure 3).

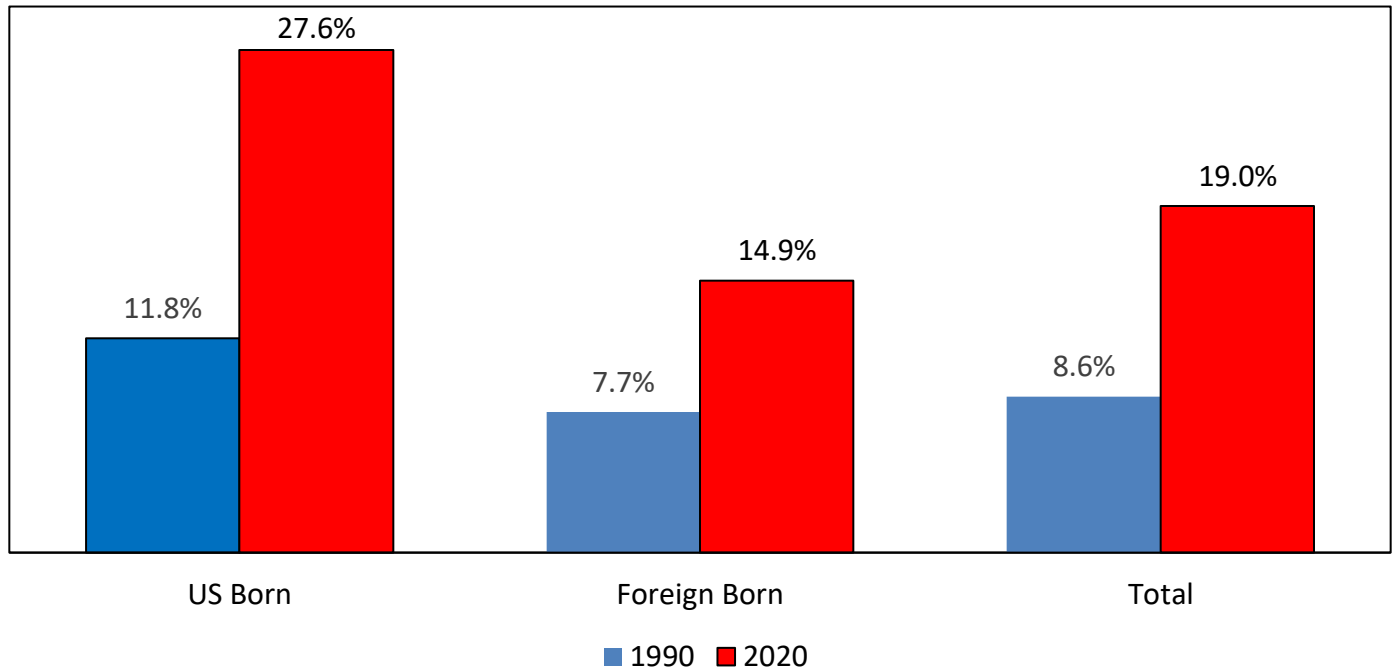
Figure 3
College Graduation Rates by Sex for All Latinos in
New York City, 1990 - 2020



Nativity was an even more important factor in differential college graduation rates. Latinos in New York City who were born in the United States had a significantly higher rates at 27.6% in 2020 than Latinos born in their countries of origin, who had a much lower 14.9% rate in 2020. Both rates were much higher than in 1990 but the opportunities for those born in the U.S., who probably had a greater dominion of English, were much more pervasive than for those Latinos who were foreign born.³ (See Figure 4).

³ Among U.S.-born Latinos in New York City in 2020 33% reported speaking ONLY English and another 65% reported speaking English well or very well. Only 6% of foreign-born Latinos reported speaking only English and 54% reported speaking English well or very well. For Puerto Ricans 'foreign-born' means born on the island.

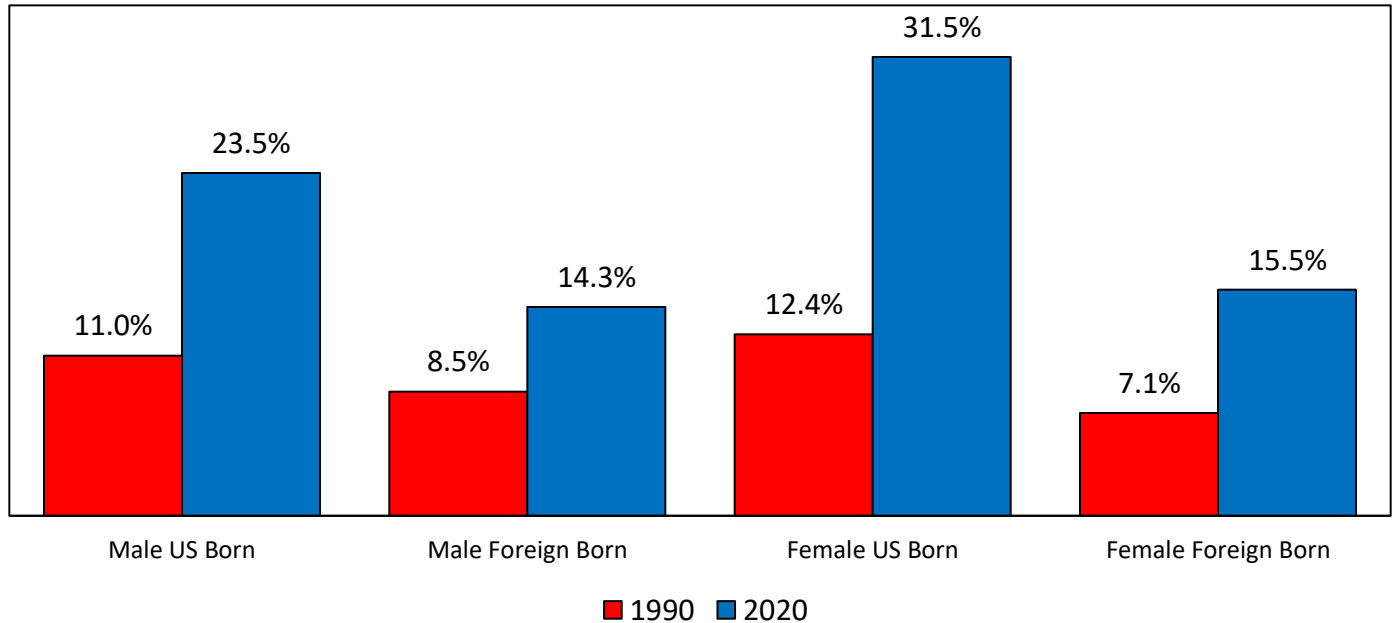
Figure 4
College Graduation Rates by Nativity for All Latinos in
New York City, 1990 - 2020



When sex and nativity are examined together, the differential between U.S.-born females and all other categories is striking. In 2020 Latinas born in the United States had a 31.5% college graduation rate, a significant increase from the 12.4% found in 1990. U.S.-born Latinos had a significantly lower rate at 23.5%.

For foreign-born Latino men in New York City the college graduation rate increased from 8.5% to 14.3% between 1990 and 2020. These rates were the lowest among each of the demographic categories examined here although among foreign-born Latinas in the City the rates were not much higher: 15.5% of adults had graduated college in 2020 which was a significant increase from the 7.1% college graduation rate in 1990. (See Figure 5).

Figure 5
College Graduation Rates by Sex and Nativity for All Latinos in
New York City, 1990 - 2020



Although Latinos are generally treated as a demographic group that merits separate analytical consideration to compare with the three other over-arching race/ethnic groups in the city, Non-Hispanic Whites, Non-Hispanic Blacks, and Asians, there were significant differences in college graduation rates when the five largest nationalities in the City are examined.

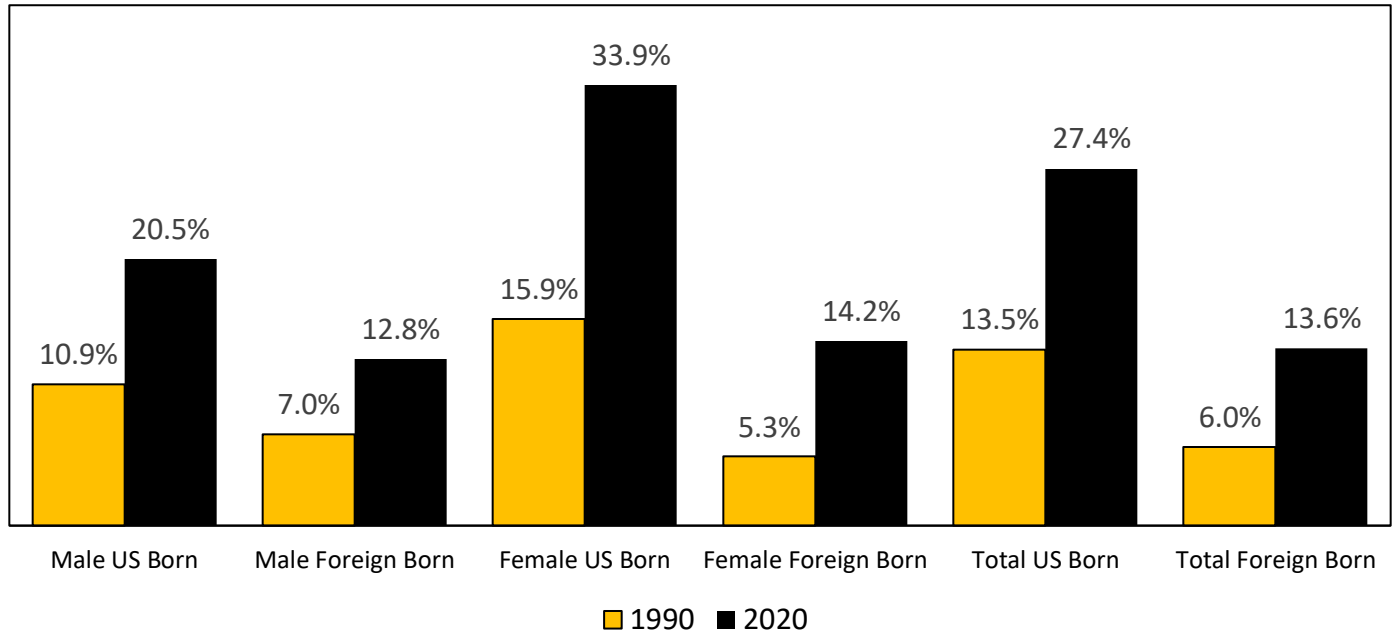
Dominicans

Dominicans became the largest Latino nationality in the City between 2010 and 2020, surpassing Puerto Ricans in about 2015 according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The data on college graduation rates reveal the extraordinary success of Dominican women who were born in the United States. In 2020 nearly 34% of them had graduated from college or achieved a higher degree. This was an increase from about 16% in 1990.

Dominican men born in the U.S. had a substantially lower college graduation rate at 20.5% in 2020 although this was an increase from the 10.9% found in 1990. Foreign-born Dominican men and women lagged substantially beyond their compatriots born in the U.S. (See Figure 6).

Figure 6
College Graduation Rates by Sex and Nativity for Dominicans in
New York City, 1990 - 2020



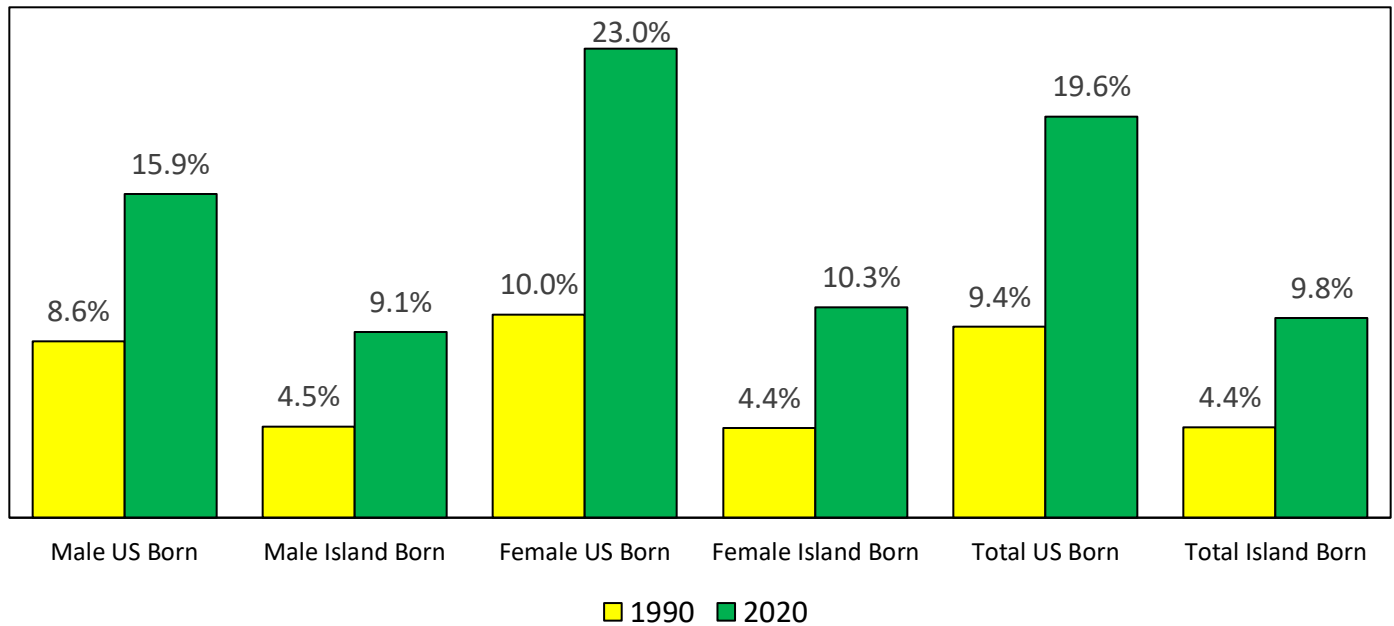
Puerto Ricans

As was the case with Dominicans, Puerto Rican women born in the United States outperformed all other groups. However, their college graduation rate at 23% in 2020 was significantly lower than the 34% rate found among U.S.-born Dominican women. Nevertheless, it was a sharp improvement from the 10% rate of 1990.

U.S.-born Puerto Rican men in New York City had a much lower college graduation rate in 2020 at nearly 16%, but it was a marked increase from the 8.6% rate of 1990.

Both island-born Puerto Rican men and women lagged significantly behind their U.S.-born counterparts at 9.1% and 10.3% respectively in 2020. Although these numbers were comparatively low, they were better than the Puerto Rican male college graduation rate of 4.5% in 1990 and the 4.4% rate found among Puerto Rican-born females in the same year. (See Figure 7).

Figure 7
College Graduation Rates by Sex and Nativity for Puerto Ricans in
New York City, 1990 - 2020



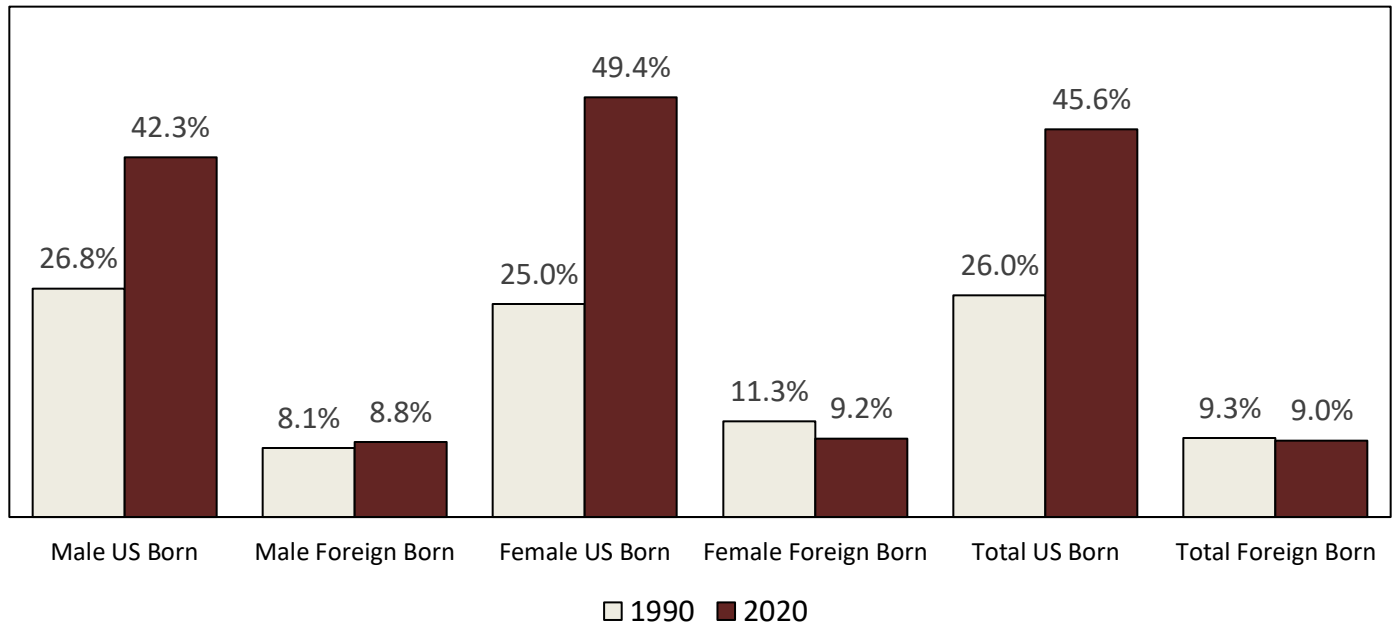
Mexicans

College graduation rates for U.S.-born Mexican women and men in New York City in 2020 were nothing short of astounding in comparison with Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. Over 49% of U.S. born women had achieved a B.A. degree or higher in 2020, up from 25% in 1990. And over 42% of U.S.-born men had graduated college in 2020—an increase from nearly 27% in 1990.

These data dwarfed the percentage of foreign-born Mexicans in the City. About 9% of both men and women had graduated college in 2020. (See Figure 8).

There is little indication from the data as to the precise reasons for these comparatively high college graduation rates among U.S. born Mexicans in the City. But these impressive rates certainly indicate the possibilities for upward social mobility among New York City's Mexican community once it has been established to permit the growth of U.S.-born Mexicans.

Figure 8
College Graduation Rates by Sex and Nativity for Mexicans in
New York City, 1990 - 2020

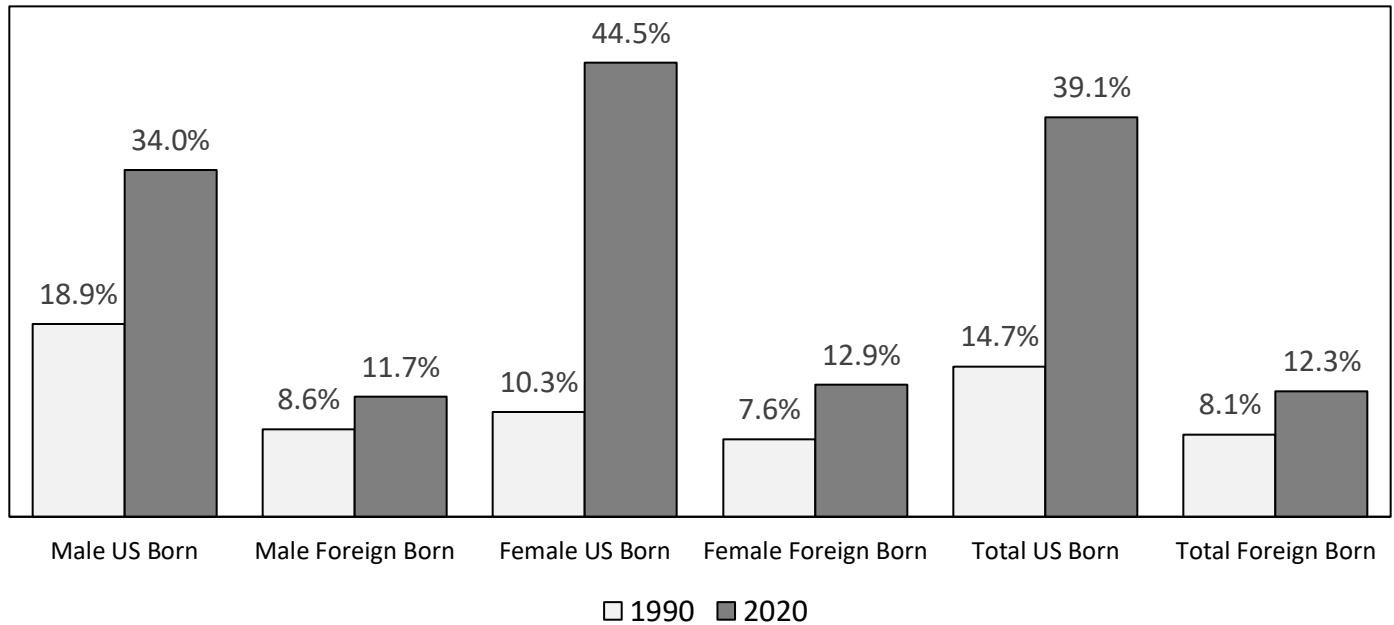


Ecuadorians

U.S.-born Ecuadorians in New York City had college graduation rates which were very similar to those found among Mexicans. An impressive 44.5% of U.S.-born Ecuadorian women had completed a B.A. degree or higher in 2020, a dramatic increase from 10.3% in 1990. Among U.S.-born Ecuadorian men, the rate was lower at 34% in 2020, a rise from nearly 19% in 1990.

As was the case among Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans the college graduation rates among foreign-born Ecuadorian women and men were much lower: nearly 13% among women in 2020 and almost 12% among Ecuadorian men. (See Figure 9).

Figure 9
College Graduation Rates by Sex and Nativity for Ecuadorians in
New York City, 1990 - 2020



Colombians

As was the case with U.S.-Born Mexican and Ecuadorian women, Colombian women born in the United States had very high college graduation rates: 30.2% in 1990 and 49.3% in 2020.

Colombian men born in the U.S. also did quite well in educational attainment levels: 18.3% had achieved a B.A. or higher in 1990 and this rose impressively to nearly 40% in 2020.

What distinguishes New York City's Colombian population from other Latino nationalities, is that foreign-born men and women had much higher college graduation rates than Dominican, Puerto Rican, Mexican or Ecuadorian foreign-born adults. These rates were not as high as for U.S.-born Colombians but nearly 26% of all foreign-born men had graduated college, and the rate for women was 24.6%. (See Figure 10).

The precise reasons for these differences can not be determined from the available data. However, these data suggest that Colombian migrants had higher educational attainment rates than the other four Latino nationalities studied in this report.

Figure 10
College Graduation Rates by Sex and Nativity for Colombians in
New York City, 1990 - 2020

