

PRIORITY ISSUE #10: IMMIGRATION

Each gubernatorial election year since 2004, Utah Foundation organizes the Utah Priorities Project in partnership with the Hinckley Institute of Politics. The project is designed to engage the public and political candidates in serious dialogue on the most important issues facing our state. It begins with survey work that establishes what voters view as the top ten issues for the election year. This month, Utah Foundation releases a series of policy briefs of each of the top ten issues. In 2012, voters listed immigration as the 10th most important priority in the election year.

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Immigration Act, this law, in combination with the strong economy of the 1990s, increased legal and illegal immigration at both the national and state level. Utah saw its foreign-born population grow from 3.4% of the state's population in 1990, to 7.1% in 2000 and 8.0% in 2010. This increase over the 20-year period from 58,600 foreign-born residents to 222,638 represents a cumulative increase of nearly 280%, more than four times the population growth rate for the entire state.¹

Despite this growth in Utah's foreign-born population, the rate at which immigrants entered the country and the state has slowed down the last few years. Between 1990 and 2000, 42% of Utah's population increase was due to net migration (which includes immigrants as well as individuals from other states). However, during the second half of the 2000s, as the economy fell into a deep recession, immigration also slowed. Nearly one-third of foreign-born residents in Utah work in construction and manufacturing jobs, sectors that were especially hard hit by the recession. As job opportunities decreased, so did the flow of immigrants into Utah. This is reflected in the fact that between 2000 and 2010, only 28% of the population increase was due to net migration. Utah actually experienced a decrease in the number of foreign-born residents between 2008 and 2009.²

Utah's Foreign-Born Population

Most of Utah's foreign-born population comes from the U.S.'s neighboring countries, with Mexico being the place of birth for 45.4% of the foreign-born population, and Canada for 3.7%. These countries were followed by China (3.2%), Oceania, not elsewhere classified (2.8%), and Peru (2.5%).³ Utah is also home to an estimated 25,000 refugees, with most being resettled from Somalia, Sudan and Bosnia.⁴

The educational attainment of Utah's foreign-born population is lower than its total population. In 2010, 32.7% of the foreign-born population had less than a high school diploma, compared to 9.4% of the total population. The foreign-born population (25.4%) and the total population (24.8%) were nearly the same for those whose highest level of education was a high school diploma, but fewer foreign-born residents (12.7%) had graduated from college compared to the state average (19.9%).

Between 2006-2010, the average unemployment rate for the foreign-born population (5.0%) was higher than the state average (4.0%). This is likely due to a higher portion of the foreign-born population being part of the labor force, and also because foreign-born residents were more likely to have less education, making them a part of the population that was hit especially hard by the recent recession.⁵

The median household income for the foreign-born population (\$42,901) is below the state average (\$56,330), despite having a higher average number of workers per household than the state average (1.63 and 1.41 respectively). In addition, a greater proportion of the foreign-born population lives below the poverty line (19.7%) than the state average (10.8%).

Impact of the Foreign-Born Population

The influx of immigrants into Utah over the last two decades has changed the state. In 1990, Utah's population was 4.9% Hispanic, which grew to 9.0% in 2000 and 13.0% in 2010. This has contributed to the growth of Utah's total minority population, which now accounts for nearly 20% of Utah's population. Though immigration rates have slowed in the last few years, Utah's minority population will likely continue to grow due to the fact that the annual birth rate for Utah's foreign-born population (88 births/1,000 women) and Hispanic population (86/1,000) is higher than the state average (81/1,000).

The growth in Utah's foreign-born population has created challenges in public education. Foreign-born students are more likely to be English-language learners (ELL), and test scores and graduation rates show this group struggles more than nearly any other in

public education.⁶ A majority of Utah's foreign-born population is Hispanic, and with a high school dropout rate of 39%, they are less likely to finish high school than any other racial or ethnic group. The dropout rate for ELL is 52%.⁷

Demographics of the Foreign-born Population in Utah			
	Total	Native	Foreign Born
Population	2,657,236	2,438,953	218,283
Race and Hispanic Origin			
White	89.40%	92.30%	57.60%
Black or African American	1.00%	0.90%	2.80%
American Indian and Alaska Native	1.20%	1.20%	0.40%
Asian	2.00%	0.80%	15.20%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.90%	0.70%	3.00%
Some other race	3.40%	2.00%	19.50%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	12.30%	8.10%	59.70%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	81.20%	86.90%	18.50%
Educational Attainment			
Less than high school graduate	9.40%	6.50%	32.70%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	24.80%	24.80%	25.40%
Some college or associate's degree	36.30%	38.20%	20.90%
Bachelor's degree	19.90%	20.80%	12.70%
Graduate or professional degree	9.50%	9.70%	8.30%
Employment and Income			
In labor force	69.20%	68.80%	72.60%
Employed	64.80%	64.50%	67.60%
Unemployed	4.00%	3.90%	5.00%
Median Household income (dollars)	56,330	57,890	42,901
Average number of workers per household	1.41	1.39	1.63
Below 100 percent of the poverty level	10.80%	10.10%	19.70%
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey			

In 2010, the Utah State Legislature passed the Utah Compact. The compact sought to guide Utah's immigration discussion by establishing five principles based on federal solutions, law enforcement, families, economy and free society. The compact received support from state and local officials, the Salt Lake Chamber, the Sutherland Institute, law enforcement, advocacy and religious organizations. In 2011, the Legislature passed a package of laws that addressed immigration enforcement, immigrant integration, and a pilot temporary worker visa program.

On November 22, 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a complaint against one of these laws, HB 497, and a temporary restraining order issued by a U.S. District Court judge in Utah on May 10, 2012, preventing the law from taking effect.⁸ This law required that an officer verify the immigration status of a person arrested for a felony or a class A misdemeanor and allowed law enforcement to question the immigration status of passengers in a vehicle where the driver has been detained. It also required verification of immigration status regarding application for public services or benefits.⁹

As Utah's foreign-born and Hispanic populations continue to grow, this will continue to affect the state. Census data show that the longer an immigrant is in the country, the more likely he or she is to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. Currently, more than two-thirds of Utah's foreign-born population entered the country after 1990, and accordingly about that same ratio have not become citizens. However, this is likely to change, leading to more foreign-born citizens becoming naturalized and thus

leading to a more diverse electorate in Utah. This may change the composition of the state's political parties as well. A majority of Utah's foreign-born population is Hispanic, and according to national data, 57% of Hispanics either identify as or lean toward the Democratic Party. This is nearly twice the rate of Hispanics who identify with or lean toward the Republican Party (24%).¹⁰ The impact of this new population may be tempered by the fact that Hispanics vote at a significantly lower rate than the national average, but they may still influence the state's politics and elections.

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¹ The population counts cited in this report are from the 1990, 2000 and 2010 decennial censuses. More specific 2010 demographic data is from the 2010 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates.

² American Community Survey, 2005-2010.

³ American Community Survey, 2010, 5-year estimates.

⁴ "Refugees At a Glance," Utah Department of Workforce Services, Refugee Services Office. Available at: <http://refugee.utah.gov/about/statisticsreports.html>

⁵ Utah Foundation Report 709, "Recovering from the Great Recession: Are We There Yet?" May 2012.

⁶ "How Utah Schools Compare to the Nation: Using the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills," Utah State Office of Education, 3/2/2009.

⁷ "2011 Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rate Report," Utah State Office of Education.

⁸ Utah Coalition of La Raza et al. v. Gary Herbert and Mark Shurtleff

⁹ "State Omnibus Immigration Legislation and Legal Challenges," National Council for State Legislatures, August 27, 2012.

¹⁰ "Partisan Polarization Surges in the Bush, Obama Years: Trends in American Values: 1987-2012," The Pew Research Center, June 4, 2012.