



Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies

# Dominicans in New York City 1990—2008

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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 Center established and helps administer an interdisciplinary specialization in Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program.

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://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies/>

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Demographics<sup>1</sup>

Between 1990 and 2008 the Dominican population of New York City increased to become the second largest Latino national sub-group behind Puerto Ricans. The Dominican population grew by nearly 73 percent between 1990 and 2008 and about 7 percent from 2000 to 2008. (See table 1 and figure 1.) Dominicans increased at approximately twice the rate of the city’s overall Latino population, although they have been substantially outpaced by Mexican and Ecuadorian population growth rates during this period. Nevertheless, a hypothetical projection indicates that the Dominican population will surpass Puerto Ricans to become the City’s largest Latino nationality sometime within the next 15 years if the annual growth rates of both groups between 1990 and 2008 continue into the future. (See figure 2.)

Table 1  
Population Trends for Largest Latino Nationalities in New York City, 1990 - 2008

	1990		2000		2008		% Change 1990 - 2008	% Change 2000 - 2008
	Total Population	%	Total Population	%	Total Population	%		
Dominicans	338,961	20.0%	547,379	24.6%	585,429	25.1%	72.7%	7.0%
Puerto Ricans	848,374	50.0%	816,827	36.7%	783,911	33.6%	-7.6%	-4.0%
Mexicans	55,587	3.3%	187,259	8.4%	294,238	12.6%	429.3%	57.1%
Ecuadorians	80,862	4.8%	149,897	6.7%	202,591	8.7%	150.5%	35.2%
Colombians	88,259	5.2%	109,710	4.9%	98,558	4.2%	11.7%	-10.2%
Others	285,336	16.8%	415,835	18.7%	370,614	15.9%	29.9%	-10.9%
Total Latino Population	1,697,379	100.0%	2,226,907	100.0%	2,335,341	100.0%	37.6%	4.9%

<sup>1</sup> All data in this report were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Use Microdata Samples for censuses of 1990, 2000 and the American Community Survey 2008 as organized and made available by Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2009, found at the internet site <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

Figure 1  
Five Largest Latino Nationalities In New York City, 1990-2008  
(in percentages of all Latinos)

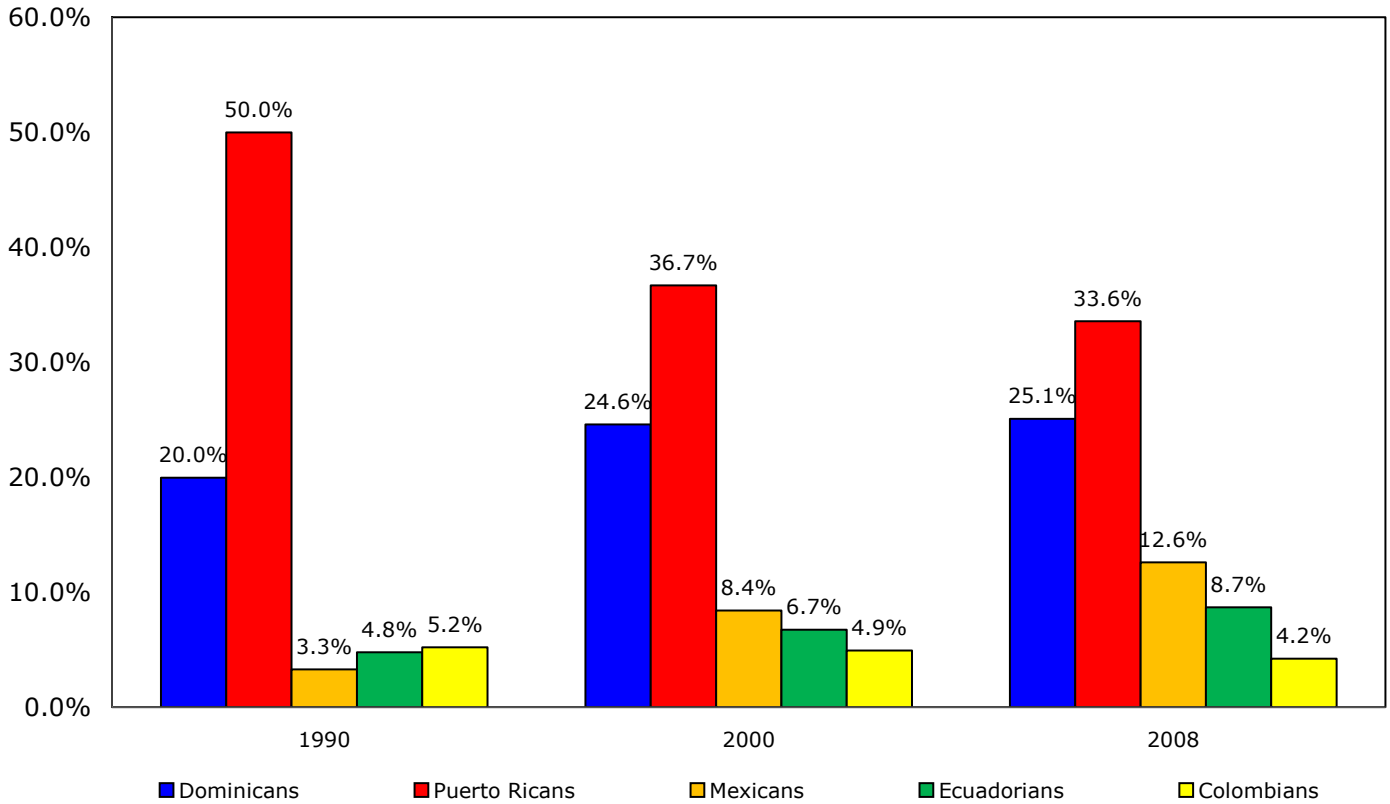
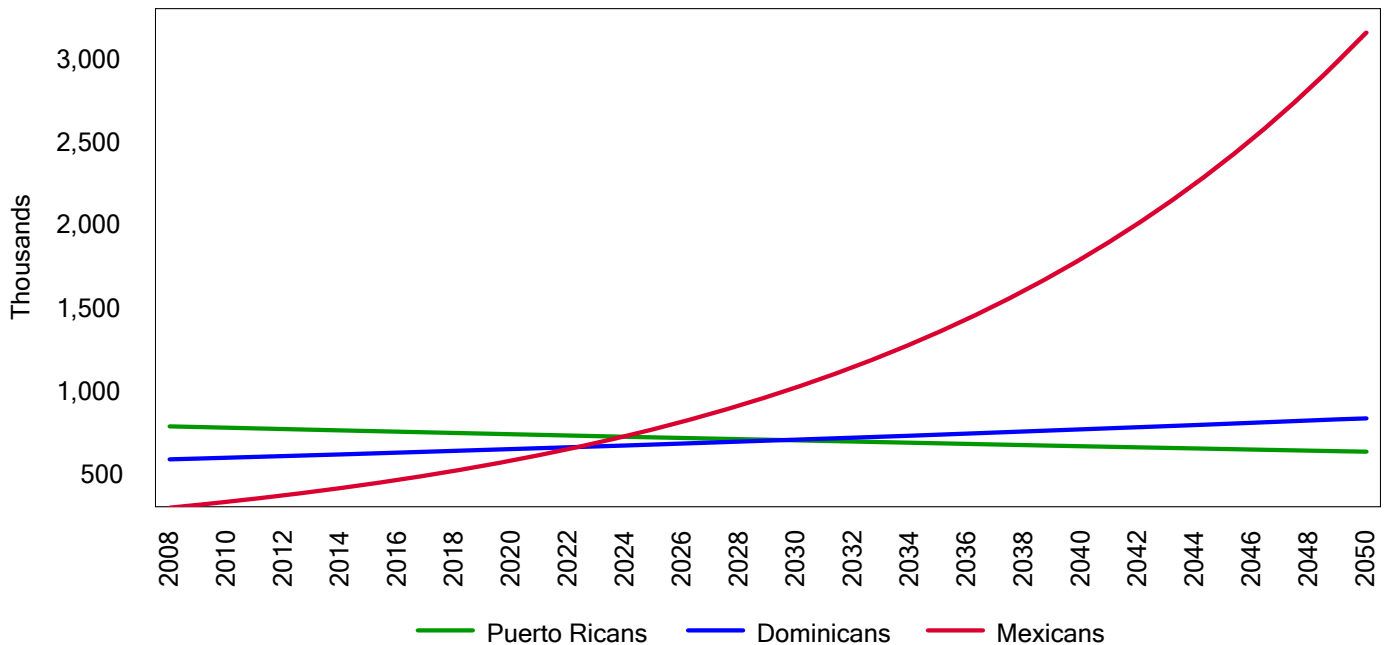
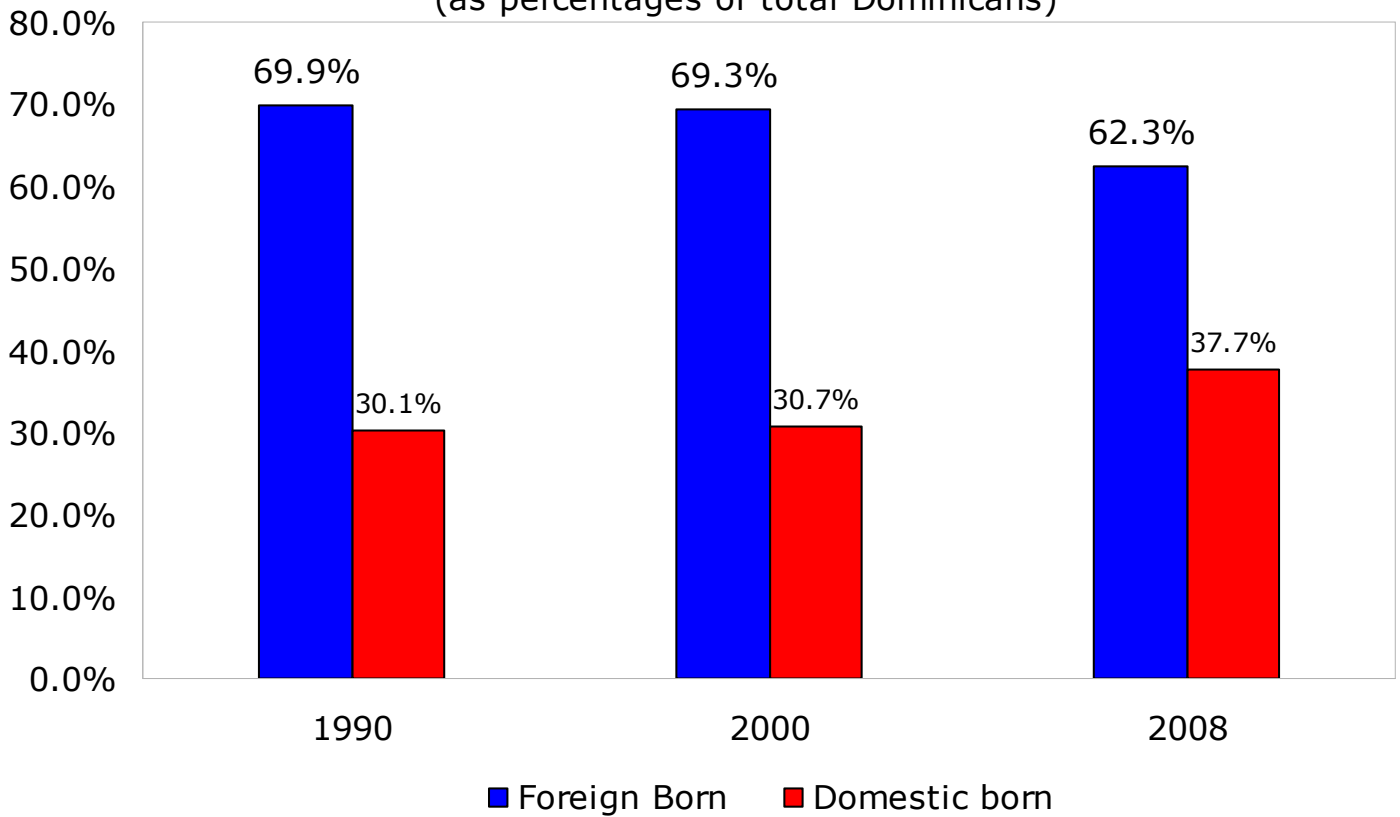


Figure 2  
Hypothetical Population Projections Among Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Mexicans in New York City  
Using Annual Population Growth Rates between 2000 and 2008



The Dominican population is characterized by a fairly high proportion of first-generation immigrants. While the percentage of Dominicans born in the United States has increased from 30% in 1990 to 38% in 2008, the population remains overwhelmingly foreign-born. (See table 2 and figure 3.)

Figure 3  
 Dominican Population in New York City by Foreign Born and Domestic Born, 1990-2008  
 (as percentages of total Dominicans)



The overall male-to-female ratio among the total Dominican population has not changed significantly between 1990 and 2008 when slightly over half of all Dominicans were female. However among the foreign-born population, women have increased slightly in relation to men. About 60% of foreign-born Dominicans were female in 2008 compared with about 56% in 1990. (See figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4  
Population Distribution by Sex among Domestic-Born  
Dominicans in New York City, 1990-2008

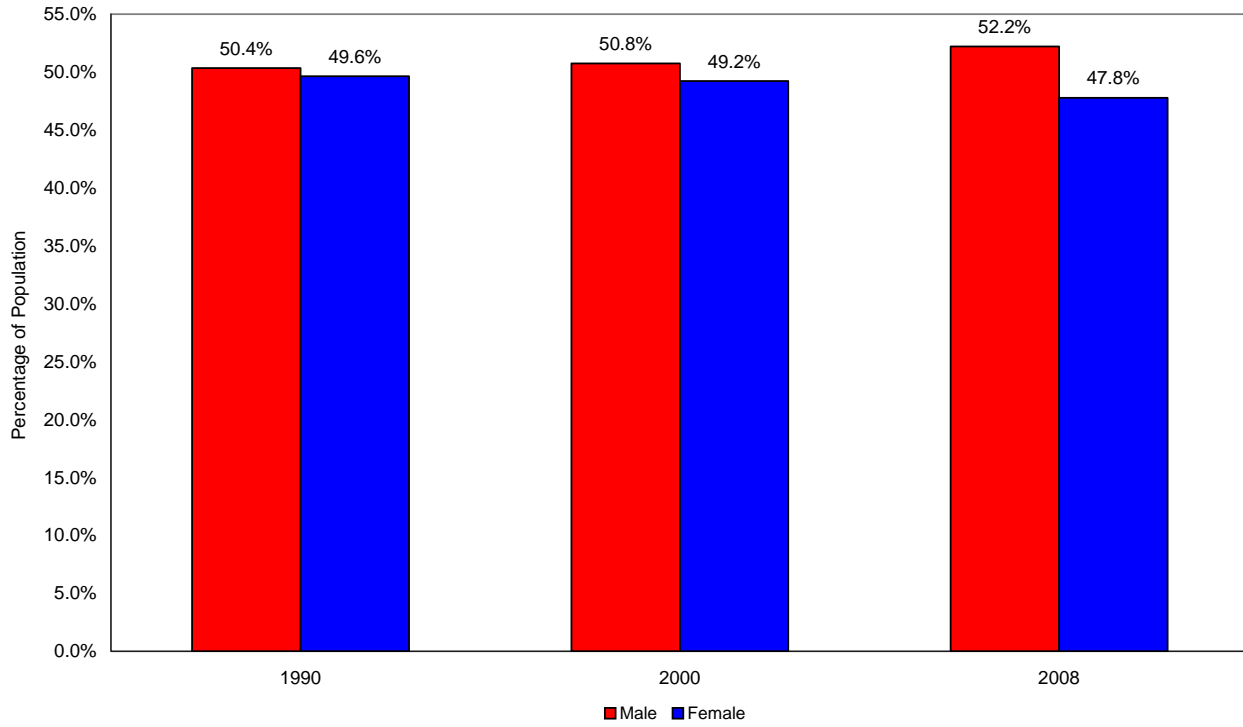
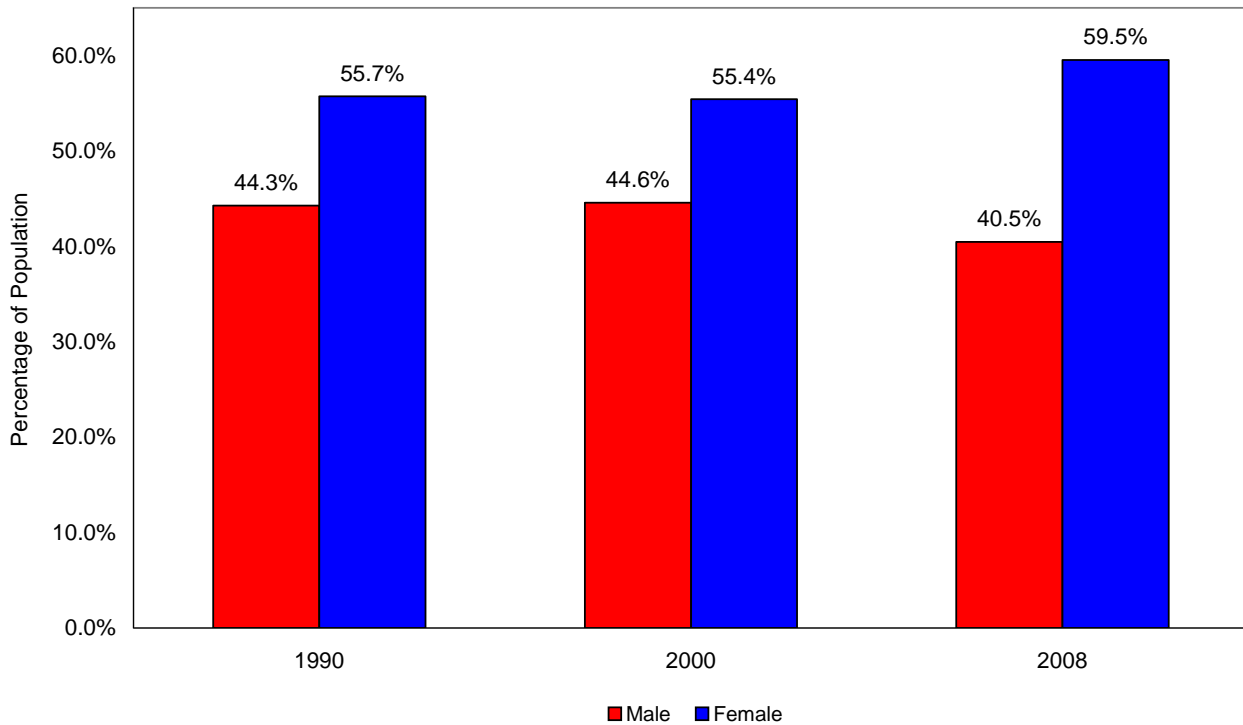


Figure 5  
Population Distribution by Sex among  
Foreign-Born Dominicans in New York City, 1990-2008



Since 1990, Dominicans have been increasingly moving to the Bronx. (See table 2 and figure 6.) While in 1990 about 40% of all Dominicans lived in Manhattan, concentrated in Washington Heights, by 2008, 39% of Dominicans were residents of the Bronx compared with 29% in Manhattan. This change in the spatial distribution of Dominicans within the City is in all likelihood attributable to the rise in housing prices in Manhattan and the relative lower cost of living in the Bronx.

The change in settlement patterns for Dominicans since 1990 points to significant cultural and demographic changes in the Bronx. The borough’s Latino population, which has for many decades has been characterized as the hub of New York City’s Puerto Rican community, is becoming much more diverse as Dominican population growth outpaces Puerto Ricans in the borough.

Table 2  
Dominican Population by Nativity and Borough in  
New York City, 1990 - 2008

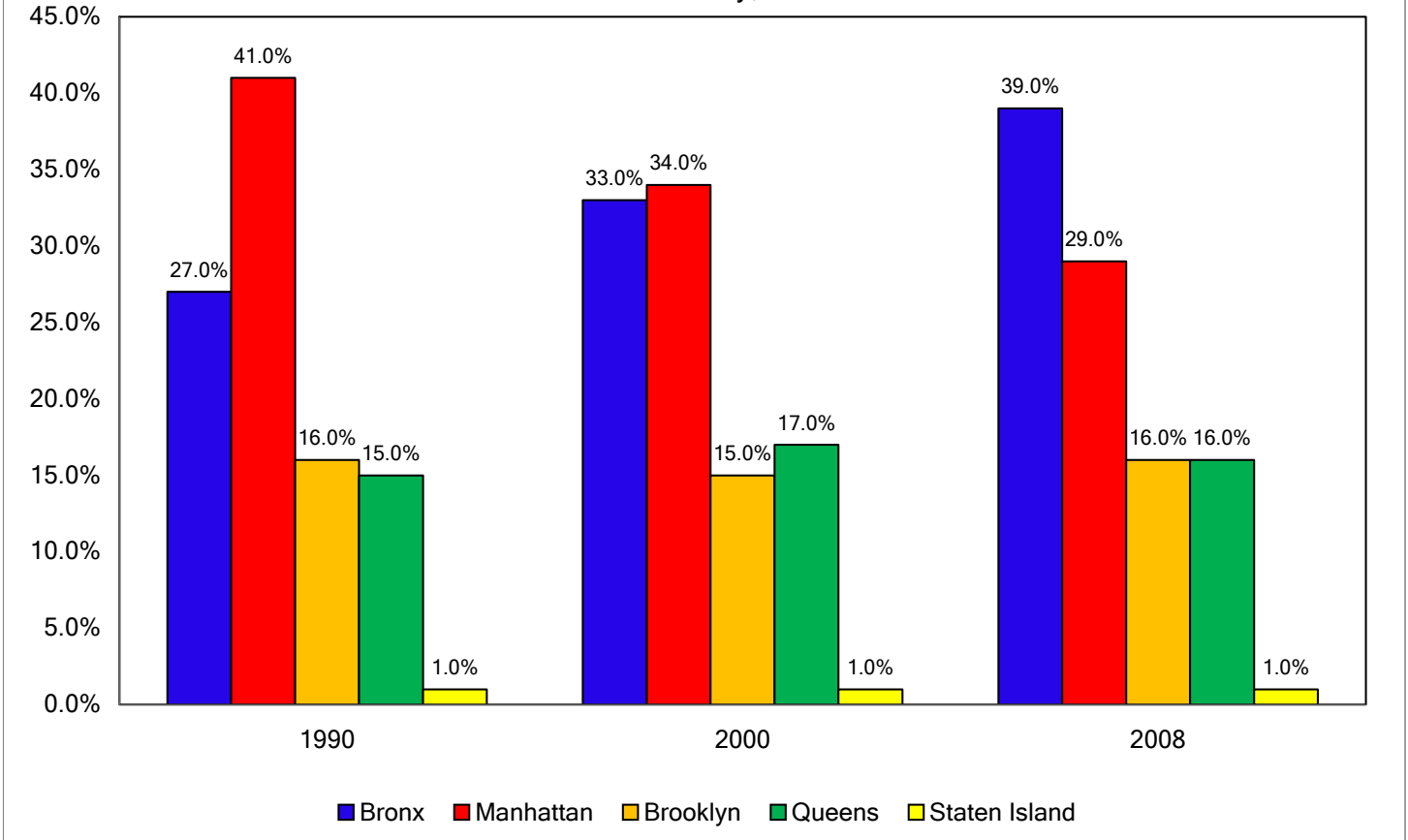
1990				
Borough	Domestic Born	Foreign Born	Total	% of all Dominicans
Bronx	25,819	63,027	88,846	27.1%
Manhattan	39,414	93,982	133,396	40.7%
Brooklyn	16,372	37,253	53,625	16.4%
Queens	16,343	33,982	50,325	15.4%
Staten Island	632	694	1,326	0.4%
Total	98,580	228,938	327,518	100.0%

2000				
Borough	Domestic Born	Foreign Born	Total	% of all Dominicans
Bronx	53,159	130,198	183,357	33.5%
Manhattan	57,378	129,344	186,722	34.1%
Brooklyn	25,702	58,219	83,921	15.3%
Queens	31,011	60,380	91,391	16.7%
Staten Island	862	1,126	1,988	0.4%
Total	168,112	379,267	547,379	100.0%

2008				
Borough	Domestic Born	Foreign Born	Total	% of all Dominicans
Bronx	88,076	142,072	230,148	39.3%
Manhattan	59,361	108,613	167,974	28.7%
Brooklyn	39,058	52,540	91,598	15.6%
Queens	32,292	60,255	92,547	15.8%
Staten Island	1,844	1,318	3,162	0.5%
Total	220,631	364,798	585,429	100.0%



Figure 6  
Total Dominican Population Distribution by Borough  
in New York City, 1990 - 2008

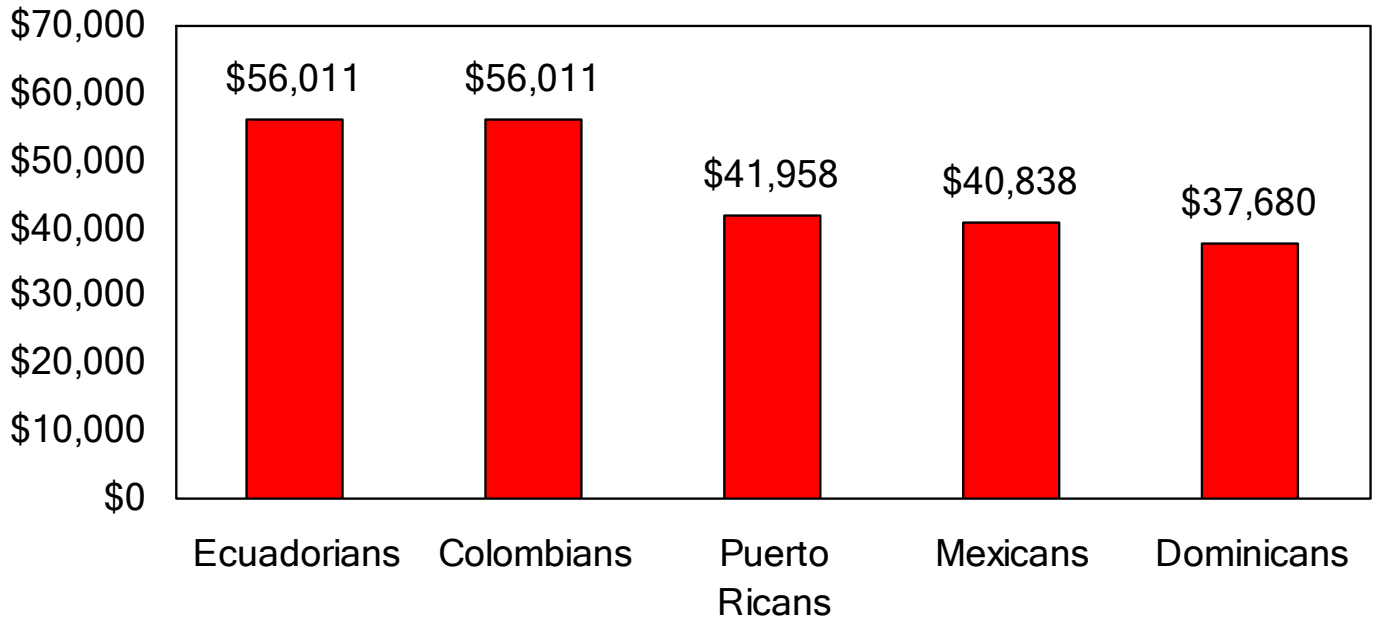


## Socio-Economic Indicators

### Household Income

The median household income for all Dominicans in New York in 2008 was \$37,680. This represented a 5.5% increase from 1990 in real dollars adjusted for inflation. However, there was a slight decline in median household incomes between 2000 and 2008 of -2.8%. In 2008 Dominicans in New York City had the lowest median household incomes among the five largest Latino national sub-groups. (See figure 7).

Figure 7  
 Median Household Income for Five Largest Latino Nationalities in  
 New York City, 2008



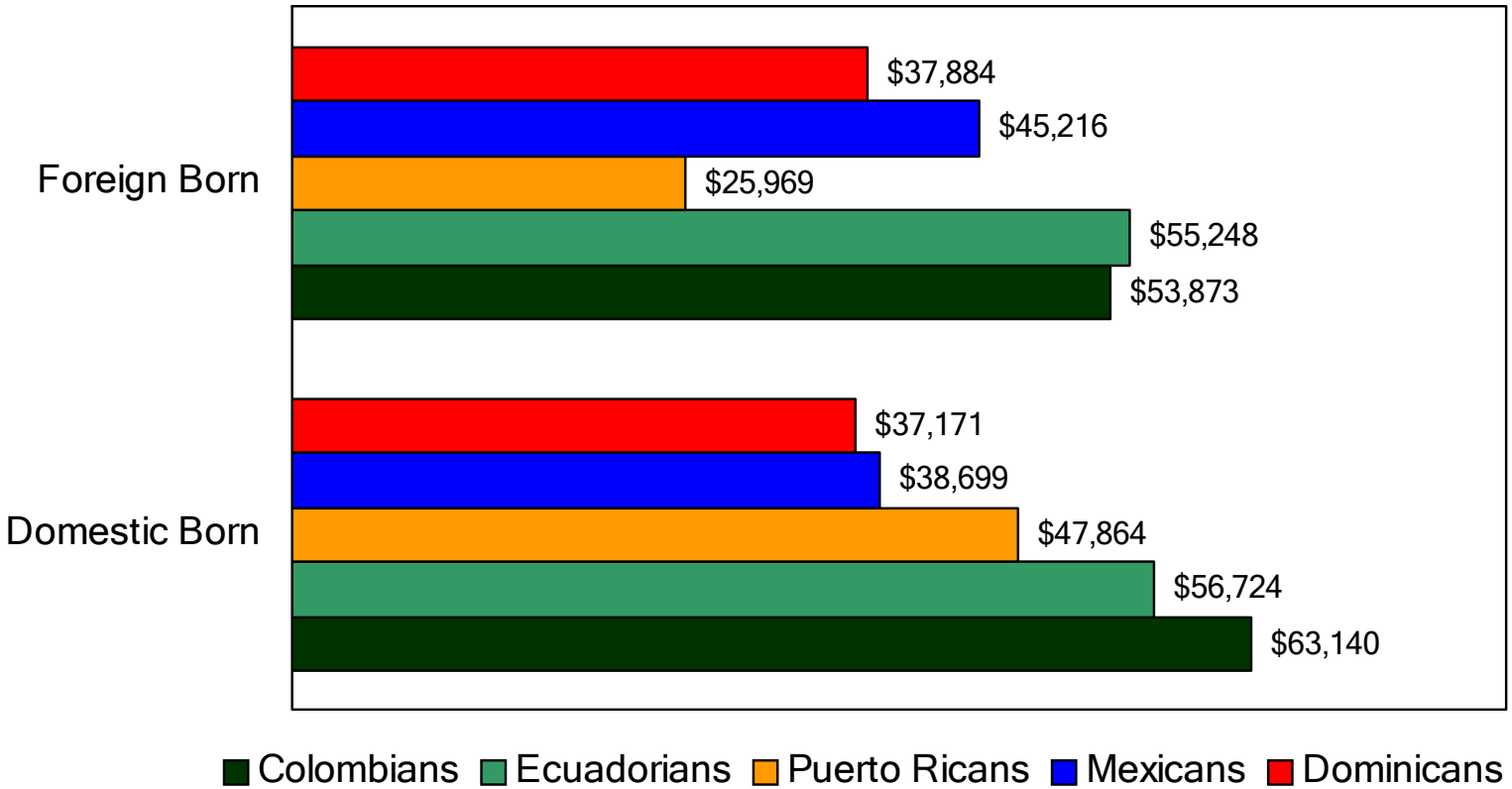
There were significant differences in the median household incomes among Dominicans by nativity in 1990. Those who were born in the Dominican Republic earned median incomes which were 28% higher than those born in the United States. However, the gap narrowed by 2008 when there was only a 2% differential between domestic-born and foreign-born Dominican households although those born in the Dominican Republic had slightly higher median incomes than U.S.-born Dominicans. (See table 3). The precise reasons for this narrowing of the differentiation in median household incomes by nativity are not revealed by the census data examined for this report.

Table 3  
 Median Household Income for Five Largest Latino Nationalities in New York City by Nativity, 1990 - 2008  
 (in inflation adjusted 2008 dollars)

	1990			2000			2008		
	Domestic Born	Foreign Born	Total	Domestic Born	Foreign Born	Total	Domestic Born	Foreign Born	Total
Dominicans	\$ 29,599	\$ 37,950	\$ 35,711	\$ 35,713	\$ 40,000	\$ 38,750	\$ 37,171	\$ 37,884	\$ 37,680
Puerto Ricans	\$ 36,300	\$ 33,000	\$ 34,650	\$ 40,000	\$ 31,250	\$ 37,500	\$ 47,864	\$ 25,969	\$ 41,958
Mexicans	\$ 49,500	\$ 56,100	\$ 54,450	\$ 44,063	\$ 50,000	\$ 48,250	\$ 38,699	\$ 45,216	\$ 40,838
Ecuadorians	\$ 41,360	\$ 52,322	\$ 49,568	\$ 52,375	\$ 53,750	\$ 53,625	\$ 56,724	\$ 55,248	\$ 56,011
Colombians	\$ 52,800	\$ 52,800	\$ 52,800	\$ 53,750	\$ 52,438	\$ 52,500	\$ 63,140	\$ 53,873	\$ 56,011

Note: For Puerto Ricans foreign-born means born on the island.

Figure 8  
 Median Household Incomes Among Five Largest New York City Latino Nationalities by Nativity, 2008

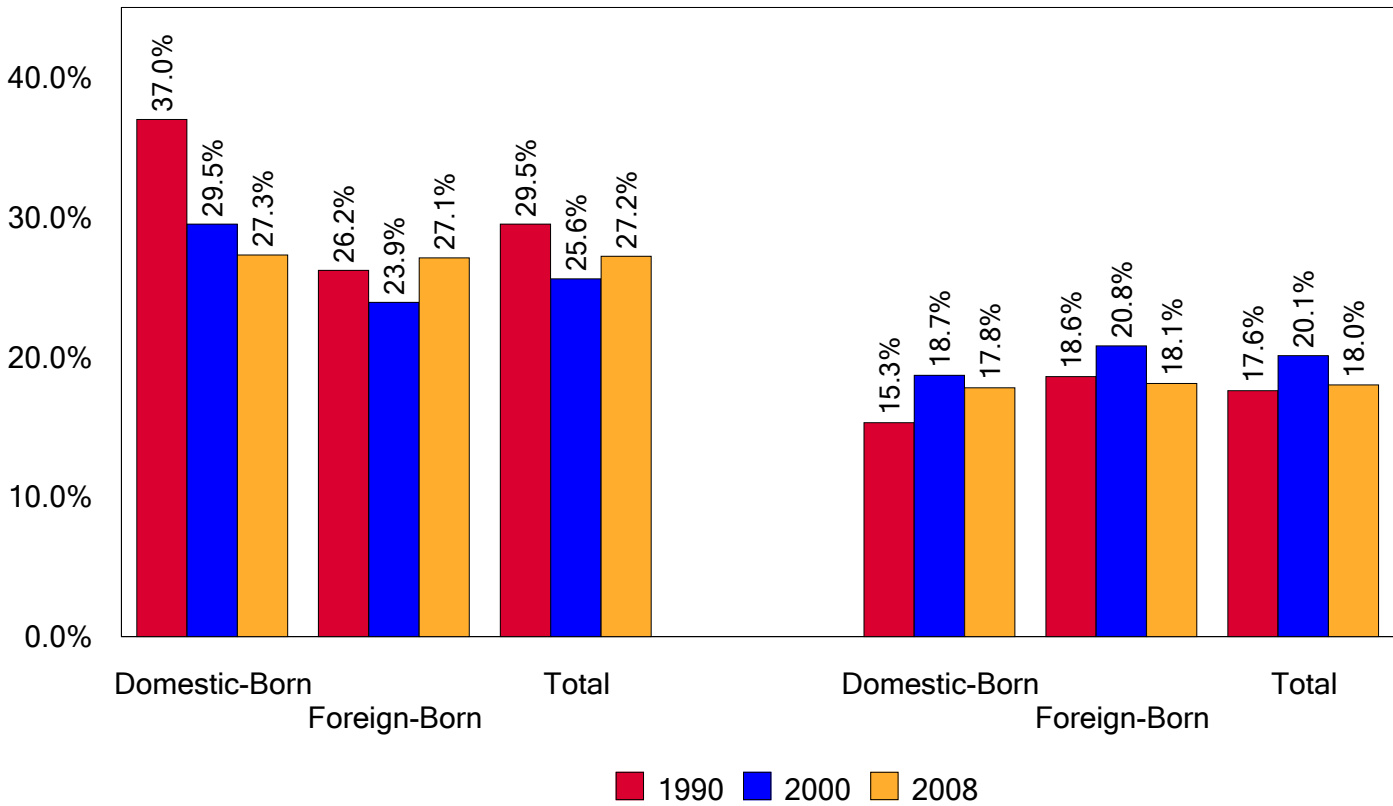


When the structure, or distribution of household income is examined a significant percentage of Dominican households earned less than \$20,000 in median household incomes and there was little change over the period between 1990 and 2008. In 1990 about 30% of all Dominican households were in this lower income category (in 2008 inflation adjusted dollars) and this had only declined slightly to 27% in 2008. In 2008 the exact same percentage of foreign-born and domestic-born Dominicans (27%) earned less than \$20,000 in median household income yearly.

There was also little change in the percentage of Dominicans living in wealthier households. Some 18% of all Dominicans lived in households earning median incomes over \$75,000 in 1990 (in 2008 inflation adjusted dollars) and this was the exact same percentage found in 2008. There was also no differentiation between foreign-born or domestic born Dominicans living in households with median incomes of \$75,000 or more – 18%. (See figure 9 and table 4 for complete data on income distribution).

Several observations may be made about these data. First and foremost there was a clear economic or class structure within the New York City Dominican community, as was the case with every other Latino nationality and the other major racial/ethnic groups in the City. Second, while Dominicans earned the lowest median household incomes among all of the Latino national sub groups, there were clearly Dominicans living in households who were quite well off economically. Third, there seems to be restricted opportunities for social mobility among Dominicans for reasons which are not clear. There was little change in the percentage of Dominicans at the top and bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy between 1990 and 2008 using median household incomes as an indicator.

Figure 9  
 Dominicans Living in Household Earning Median Incomes Less than \$20,000 and Greater than \$75,000 in New York City 1990 - 2008 (in 2008 inflation adjusted dollars)



**Poverty**

The poverty rates for Dominicans in New York declined considerably since 1990 (see figures 10 and 11). In 1990, 38 percent of Dominicans lived below the poverty line, dropping to 29 percent in 2008. It is interesting to note that foreign-born Dominicans were slightly less likely to live below the poverty line than U.S.-born Dominicans. In 2008, 31 percent of Dominicans born in the United States lived below the poverty line, while 28 percent of the foreign-born did. However, since 1990 the proportion of U.S.-born Dominicans living below the poverty rate has declined more steeply than for the foreign born; if this trend continues a convergence of poverty rates among the domestic- and foreign-born may be expected.

Compared with the other major Latino national sub-groups in the City Dominicans had a slightly smaller percentage of their overall population living in poverty (29%) than Mexicans (33%) or Puerto Ricans (31%), but rates which were much higher than among Ecuadorians (20%) or Colombians (15%). (See figure 12).

Table 4  
Household Income Distribution Among Dominicans in New York City by  
Nativity, 1990 - 2008 (in 2008 inflation-adjusted 2008 dollars)

		1990	2000	2008
Birthplace	Income Category	% Households	% Households	% Households
Domestic Born	Less than 10,000	16.0%	15.1%	11.5%
	10,000-19,999	20.9%	14.4%	15.8%
	20,000-29,999	12.2%	12.6%	13.3%
	30,000-39,999	10.0%	11.9%	12.1%
	40,000-49,999	9.8%	11.0%	8.6%
	50,000-74,999	15.7%	16.3%	20.9%
	75,000-99,999	7.3%	9.0%	7.6%
	100,000 - 199,999	7.7%	8.2%	9.6%
	200,000 +	0.4%	1.5%	0.6%
	Total		100.0%	100.0%
Foreign Born	Less than 10,000	11.4%	10.8%	9.5%
	10,000-19,999	14.7%	13.1%	17.6%
	20,000-29,999	12.5%	12.6%	12.5%
	30,000-39,999	13.1%	12.9%	13.2%
	40,000-49,999	11.6%	11.1%	9.8%
	50,000-74,999	18.0%	18.6%	19.3%
	75,000-99,999	9.5%	9.8%	8.9%
	100,000 - 199,999	8.3%	9.3%	7.9%
	200,000 +	0.8%	1.7%	1.4%
	Total		100.0%	100.0%
Total	Less than 10,000	12.8%	12.1%	10.3%
	10,000-19,999	16.6%	13.5%	16.9%
	20,000-29,999	12.4%	12.6%	12.8%
	30,000-39,999	12.2%	12.6%	12.8%
	40,000-49,999	11.1%	11.1%	9.4%
	50,000-74,999	17.3%	17.9%	19.9%
	75,000-99,999	8.8%	9.5%	8.4%
	100,000 - 199,999	8.1%	9.0%	8.5%
	200,000 +	0.7%	1.6%	1.1%
	Total		100.0%	100.0%

Figure 10  
Poverty Status For Dominicans in New York City, 1990 - 2008  
(in percentage of total population)

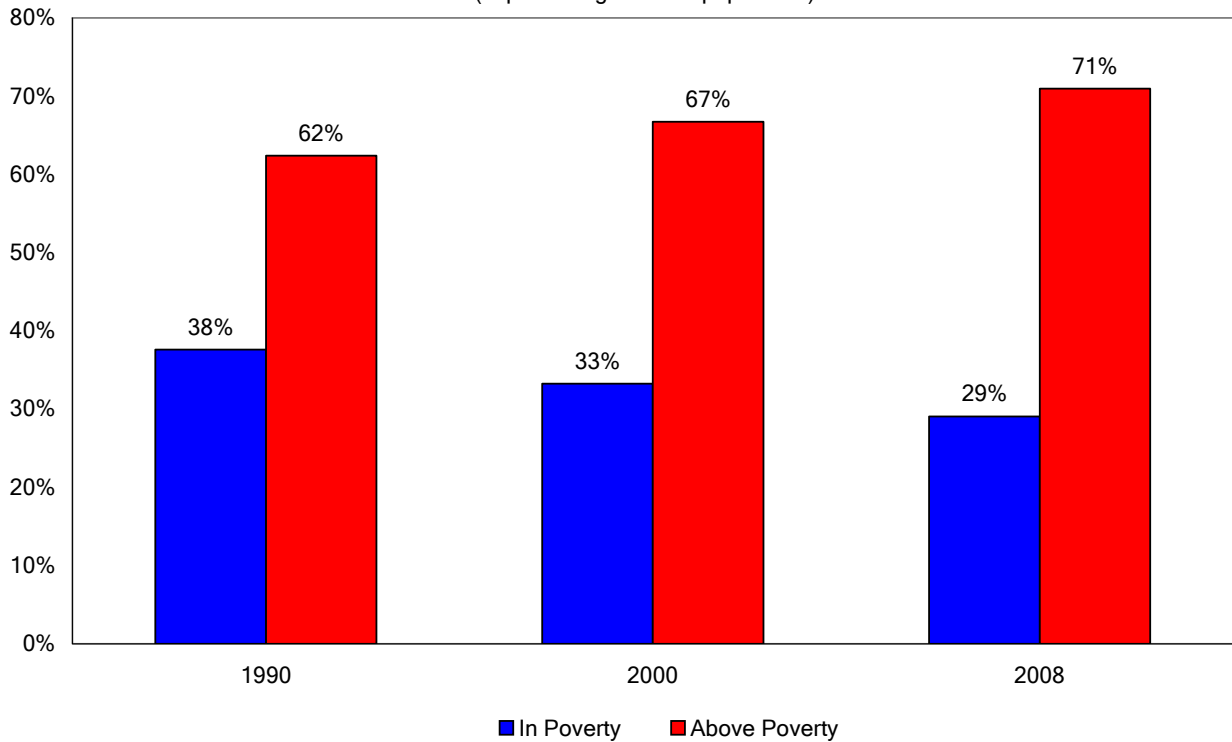


Figure 11  
Poverty Rates Among Domestic-Born and Foreign-Born Dominicans in New York City, 1990 - 2008  
(in percentages of total population)

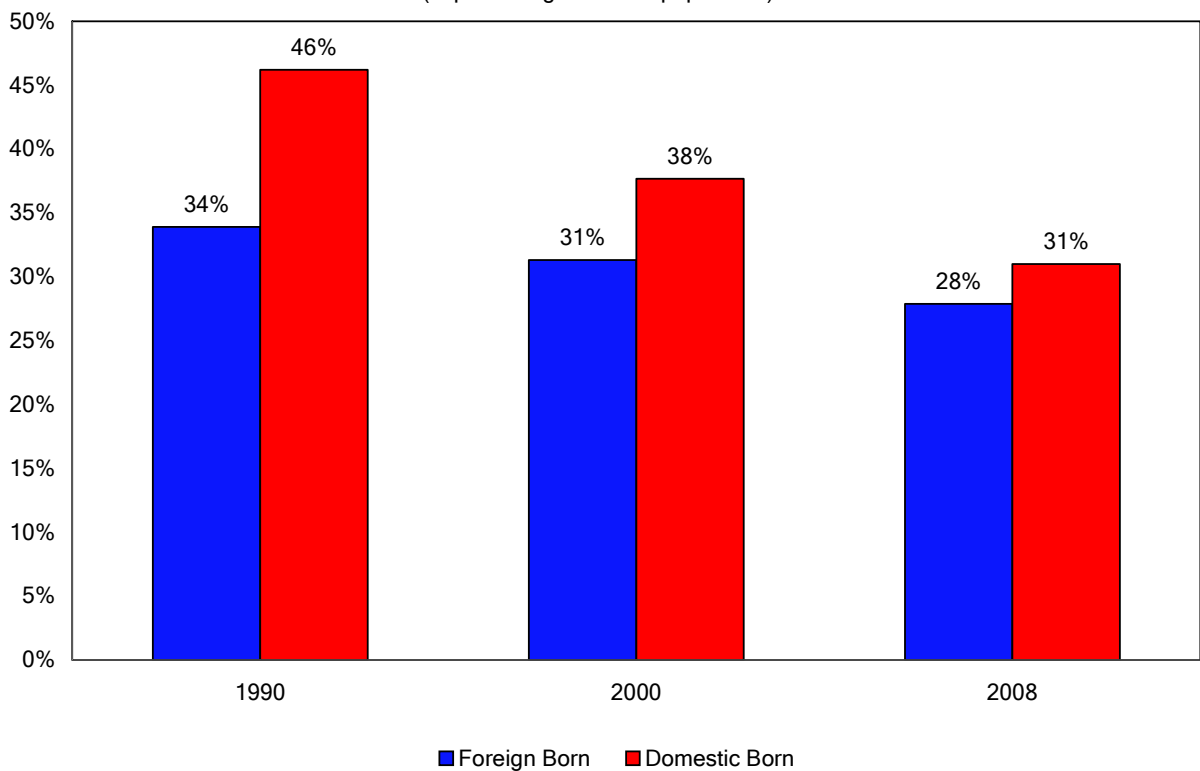
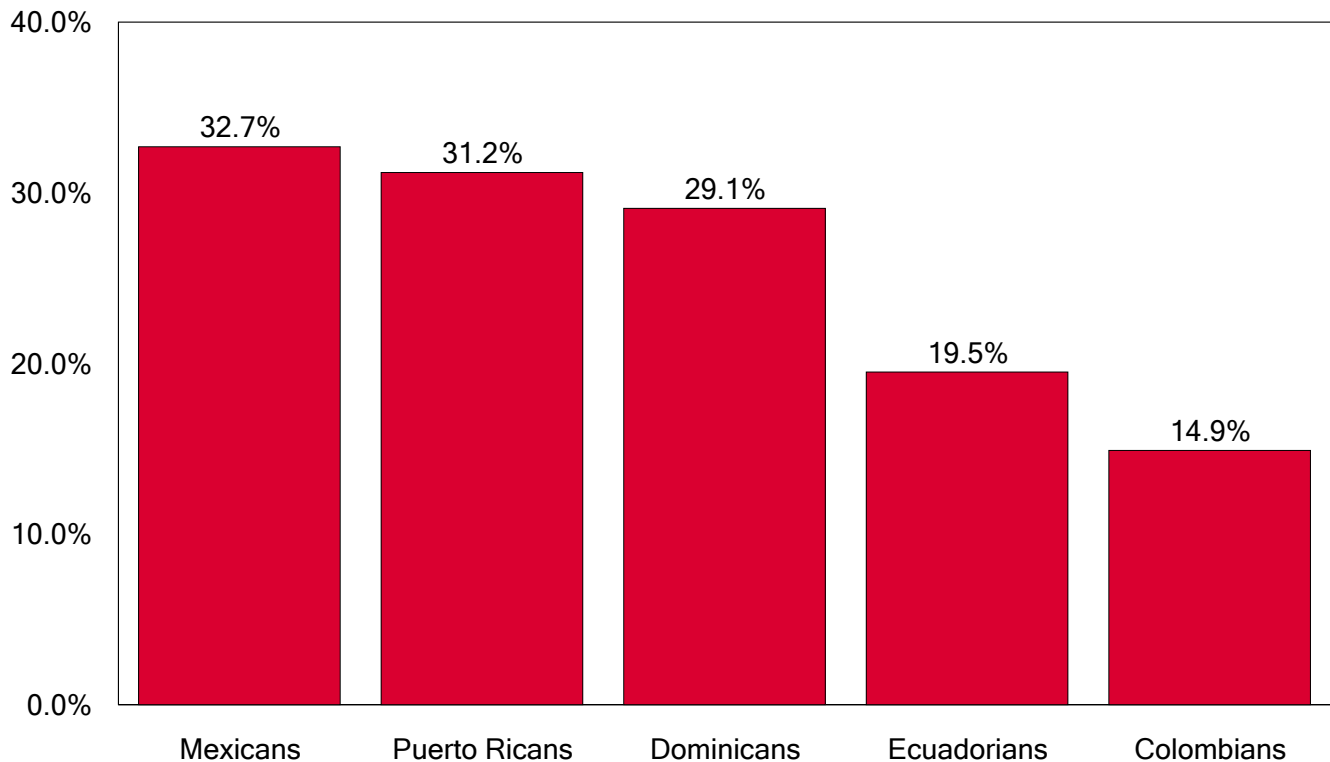


Figure 12  
 Percentage of Population Living in Poverty by Largest Latino Nationalities in New York City, 2008



### Labor Force Participation and Unemployment

Between 1990 and 2008 labor force participation rates have fluctuated among working-age Dominicans (defined as people aged 16-60) in New York City. There was a downward trend in employment between 1990 and 2000 among Dominican men, although stability was evident among all Dominican women. This was followed by a sharp upward movement in employment rates among both men and women between 2000 and 2008. By 2008 about two-thirds of all Dominicans, both men and women were in the labor force. (See figure 13). By 2008 it is conspicuous that foreign-born Dominican males and females had significantly higher employment rates than their domestic-born counterparts. (See figure 14).

We have focused upon labor force participation rates rather than unemployment because unemployment rates are only calculated by examining people who are actively seeking work. Those who were not looking for jobs are not counted among the unemployed population. Thus, labor force participation may be a more accurate way to gauge employment among Dominicans in New York City. Another important indicator which affects both of the above measures of the working-age population is the percentage of people who are classified as ‘not in the labor force’ which means not seeking work for whatever reason.

Figure 13  
 Employment Rates Among Dominicans in New York City by Sex, 2008  
 (population ages 16 - 60)

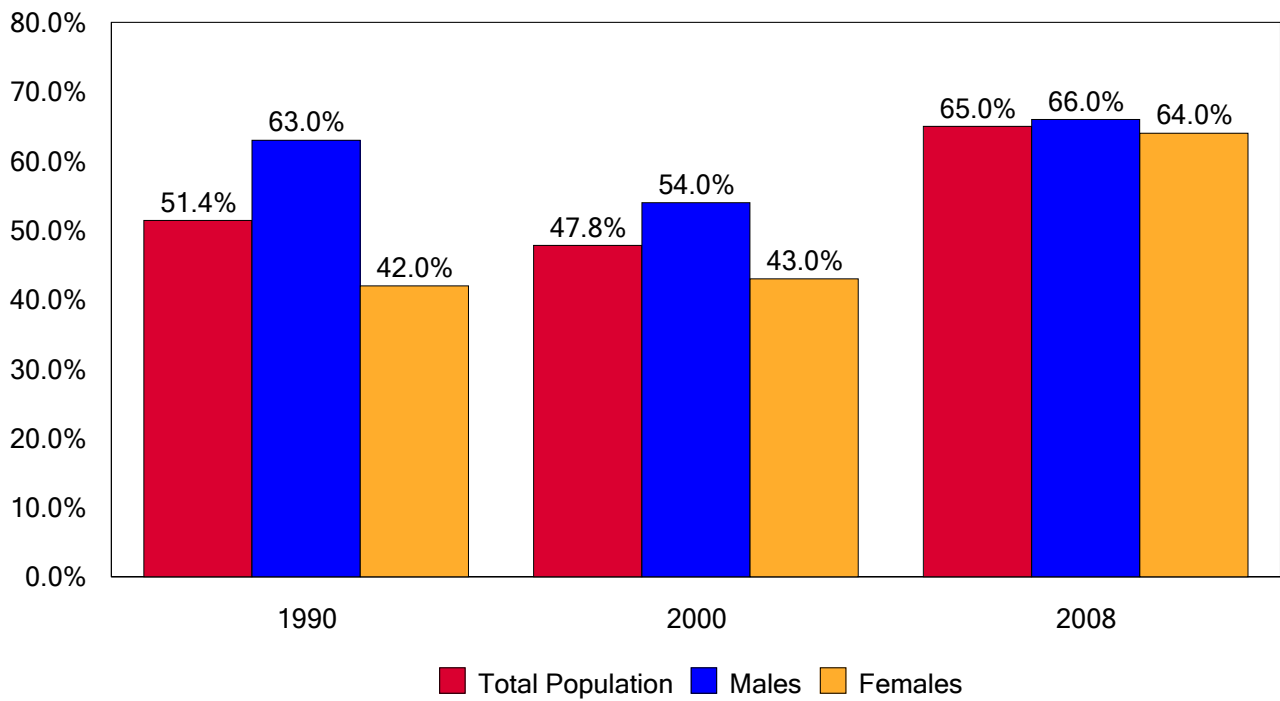
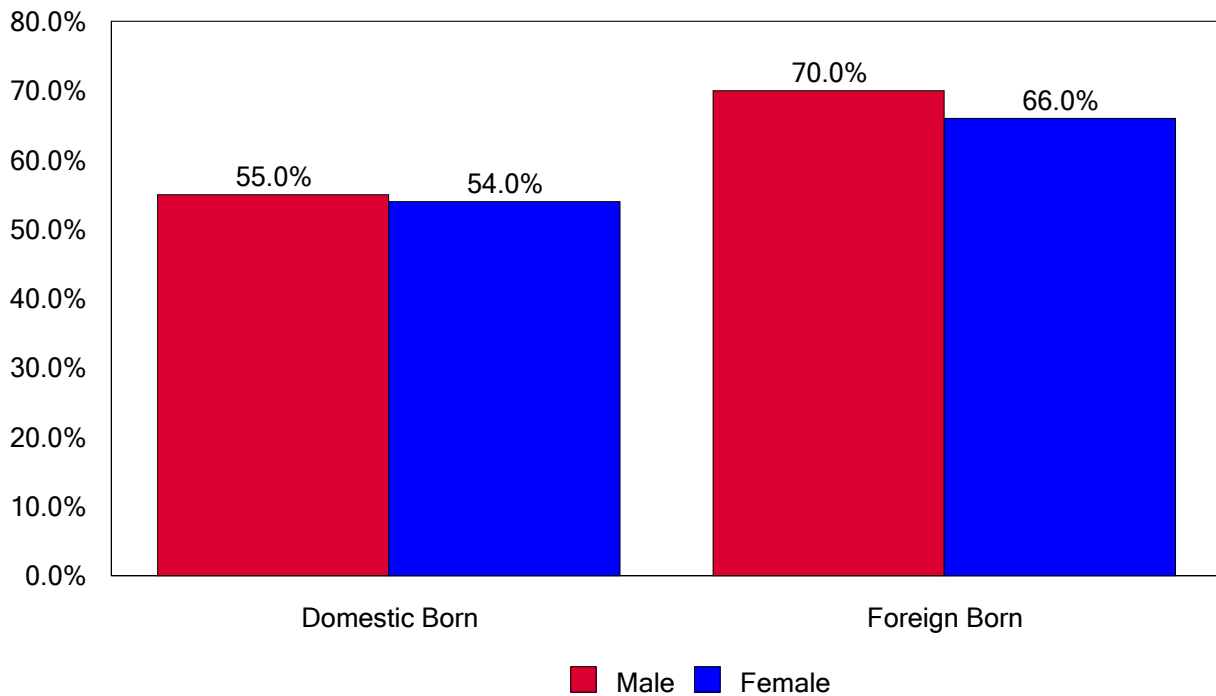


Figure 14  
 Employment Rates Among Dominicans in New York City by Nativity and Sex, 2008  
 (population ages 16 - 60)





What stands out among New York City Dominicans is the gradual decline in unemployment – from 11% to 7% between 1990 and 2008, and the dramatic drop in those Dominicans between 16 and 60 years of age who were not seeking work between 2000 and 2008. In 2000 some 43% of all Dominican adults were classified as being out of the labor force, an increase from 38% in 1990. However, this rate fell to 25% in 2008. (See figure 15).

There were important differentiations by nativity and sex in these labor-force data. Unemployment rates for domestic-born females (7%) were lower than for domestic-born males (9%) in 2008, although ‘not in the labor force rates’ were slightly higher for females – 39% to 36%. These same patterns were also found among foreign-born Dominicans. Foreign-born females had a 6% unemployment rate in 2008 compared with 10% among Dominican males. However 20% of foreign-born males were not seeking work compared with a 28% rate among foreign-born Dominican females between ages 16 and 60 in 2008. One stark contrast in these data is the differentiation in out of the work force rates for domestic-born Dominican females (39%) compared with foreign-born females (28%).

Thus, despite higher unemployment rates, Dominican males, whether domestic or foreign born, had higher labor force participation rates than females. (See figure 16). Part of the explanation for larger percentages of Dominican women remaining out of the labor force, especially the domestic born, may be related to a greater propensity for women to take responsibilities for child-rearing rather than actively seeking employment.

Figure 15  
Unemployment and Not in Labor force Rates Among Dominicans in New York City, 1990 - 2008  
(population ages 16 - 60)

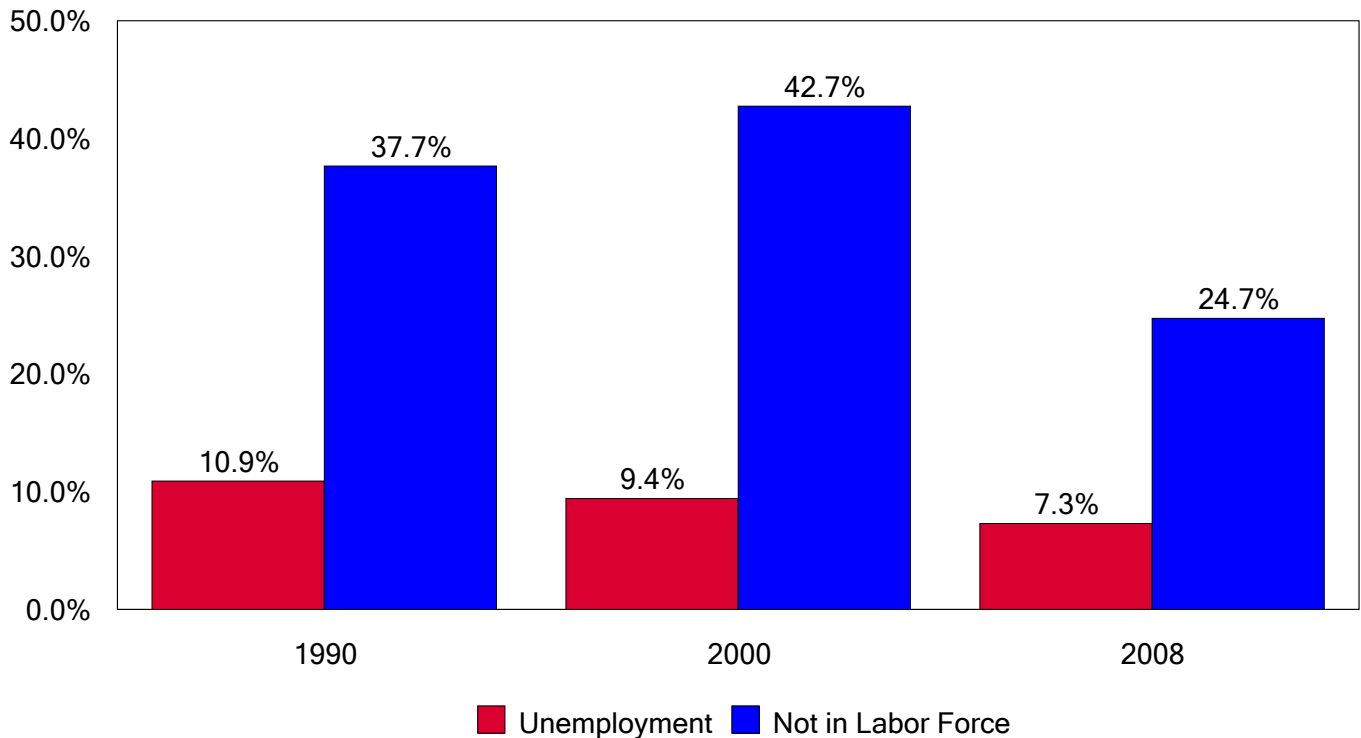
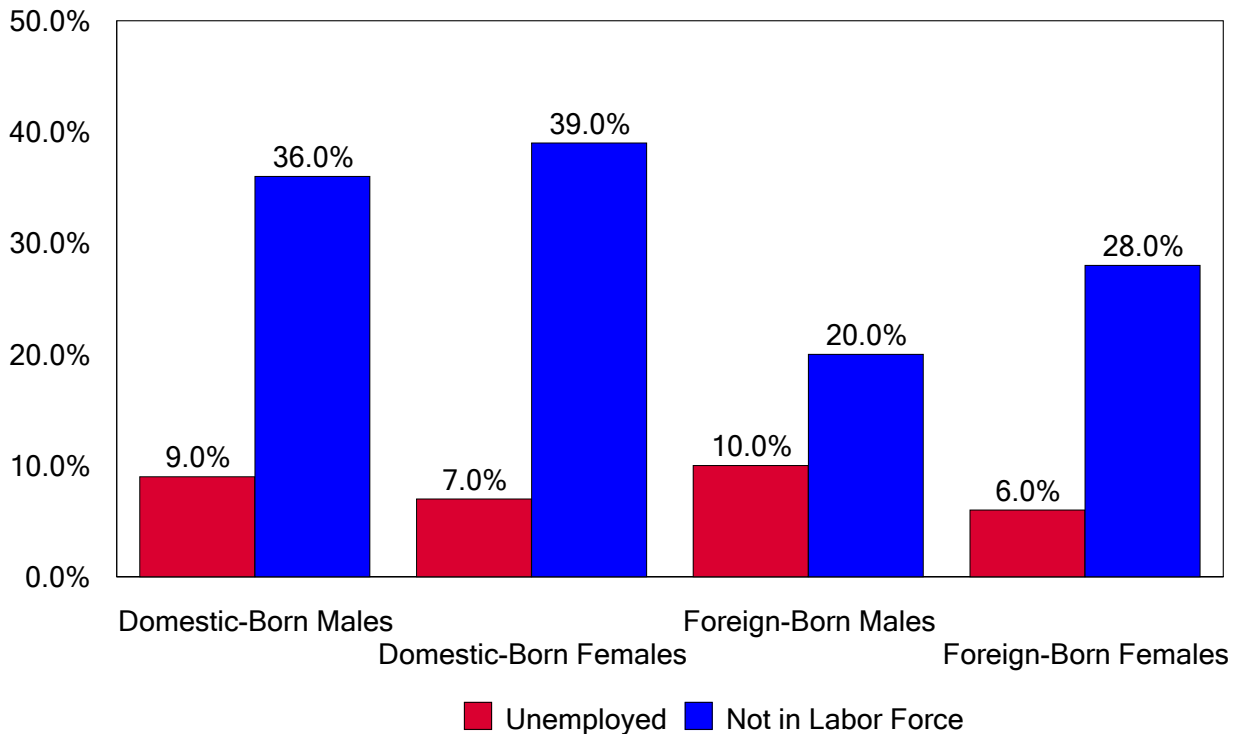


Figure 16  
 Unemployment and Not in Labor force Rates Among Dominicans by Nativity and Sex  
 in New York City, 2008 (population ages 16 - 60)



### Educational Attainment

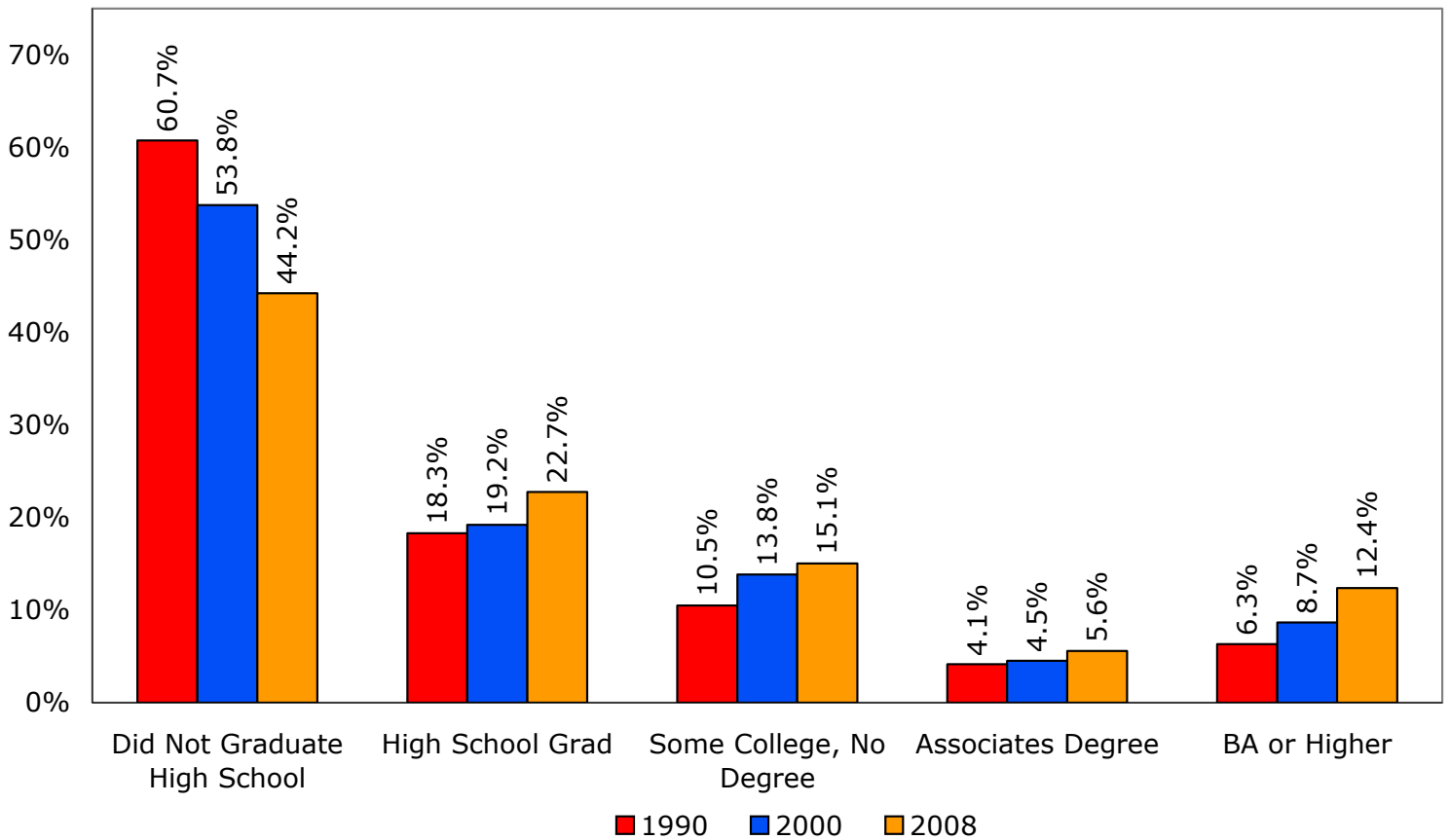
Educational attainment for Dominicans has improved significantly since 1990. In 1990 an extraordinarily high 61% of all Dominicans living in New York City 25 years of age and older had not graduated from high school. By 2008 this figure had declined to 44%. The college graduation rate also improved from about 6% of all Dominicans who had completed a B.A. degree or higher in 1990 to 12% in 2008. (See figure 17).

Despite these significant improvements, foreign-born Dominicans had much lower levels of educational attainment than their U.S.-born counterparts. By 2008, only 16% of New York City Dominican adults born in the United States had not finished high school, compared with 48% percent of foreign-born Dominicans. While 24% of U.S.-born Dominicans 25 years of age and older had achieved a B.A. degree or higher, only 11% of foreign-born Dominicans achieved this educational attainment level. (See figures 18 and 19).

These are encouraging statistics, not only because overall educational attainment levels have improved so significantly, but because of fairly high educational attainment levels among domestic-born Dominican adults living in New York City. They accounted for only 11% of all Dominicans 25 years of age and older in 2008 as foreign-born adults still predominated demographically because of the post-1980 wave of large-scale migration. However, it is certain that the percentage of domestic-born Dominicans among adults will increase markedly in the future as those born in the U.S. age, and that their educational attainment levels will continue to improve.

These data are also encouraging when sex and nativity are examined. Although domestic-born Dominicans 25 years of age or older represent a small percentage of Dominican adults their educational attainment levels are extraordinary compared with Dominican adult immigrants. An extraordinary 34% of Dominican women adults born in the United States had completed a B.A. degree or higher in 2008 and 17% of Dominican men who were domestic born and at least finished college. This compared to 10% of foreign-born women and 12% of foreign-born Dominican men 25 years of age or older. (See figures 20 and 21). The disparity in college graduation rates between domestic born Dominican men and women is striking and suggests that Dominican females are extraordinarily committed to furthering their educations.

Figure 17  
Educational Attainment for Dominicans 25 Years of Age and Older in New York City, 1990 - 2008 (in percentages)



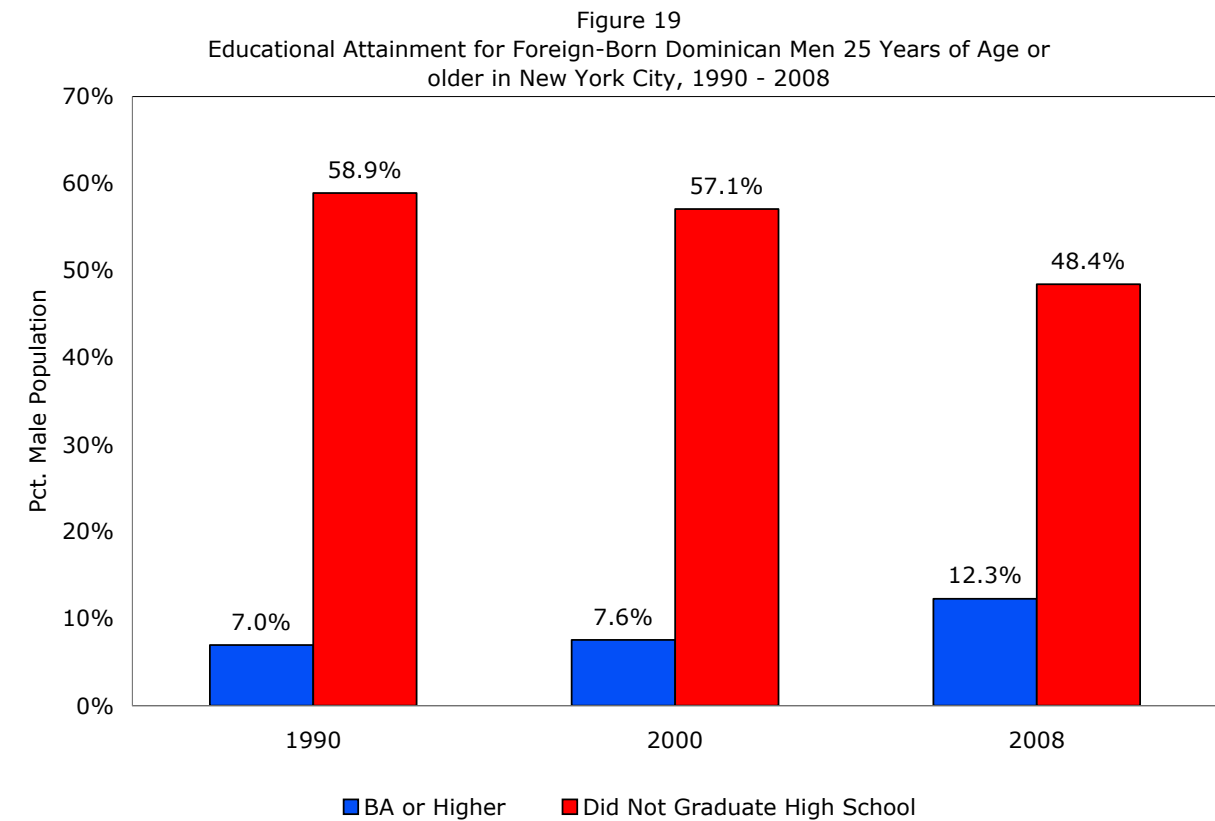
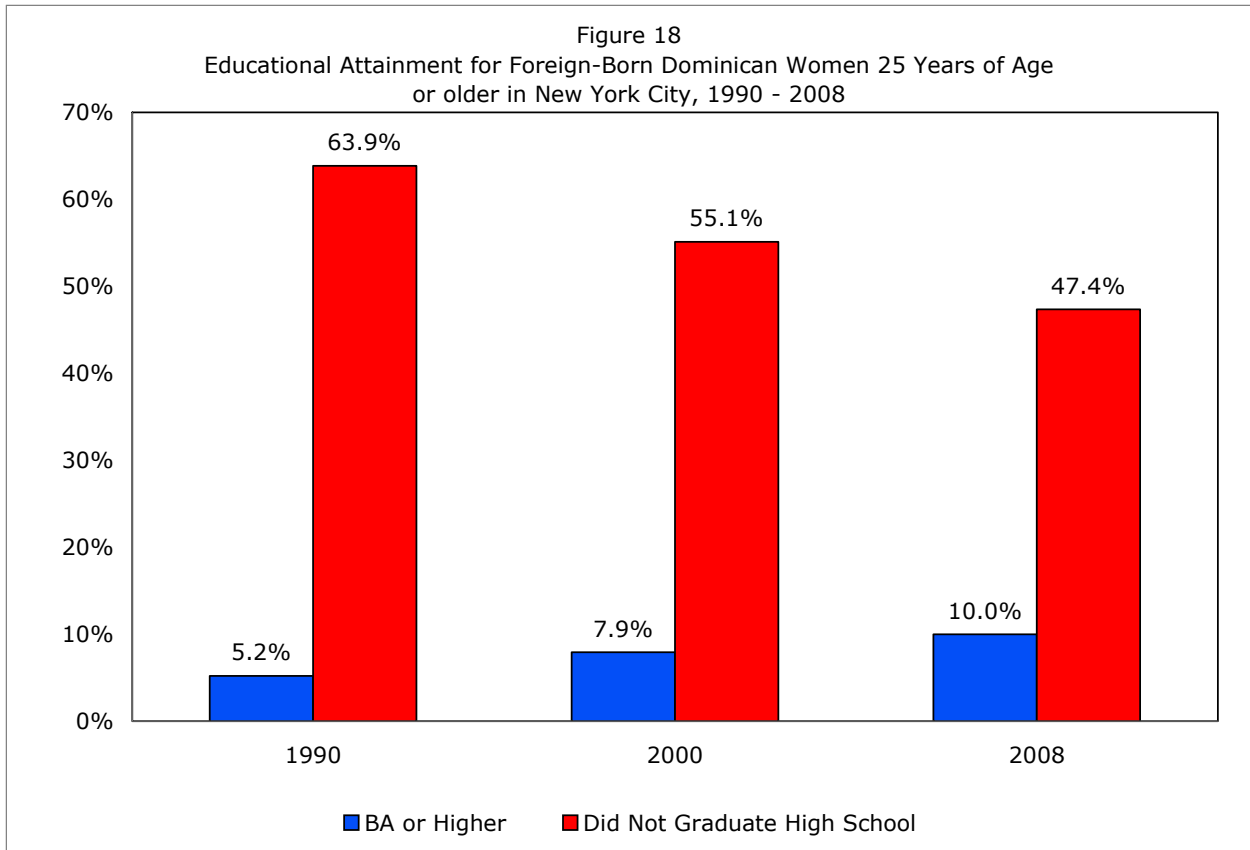


Figure 20  
Educational Attainment for Domestic-Born Dominican Men 25 Years of Age or older in New York City, 1990 - 2008

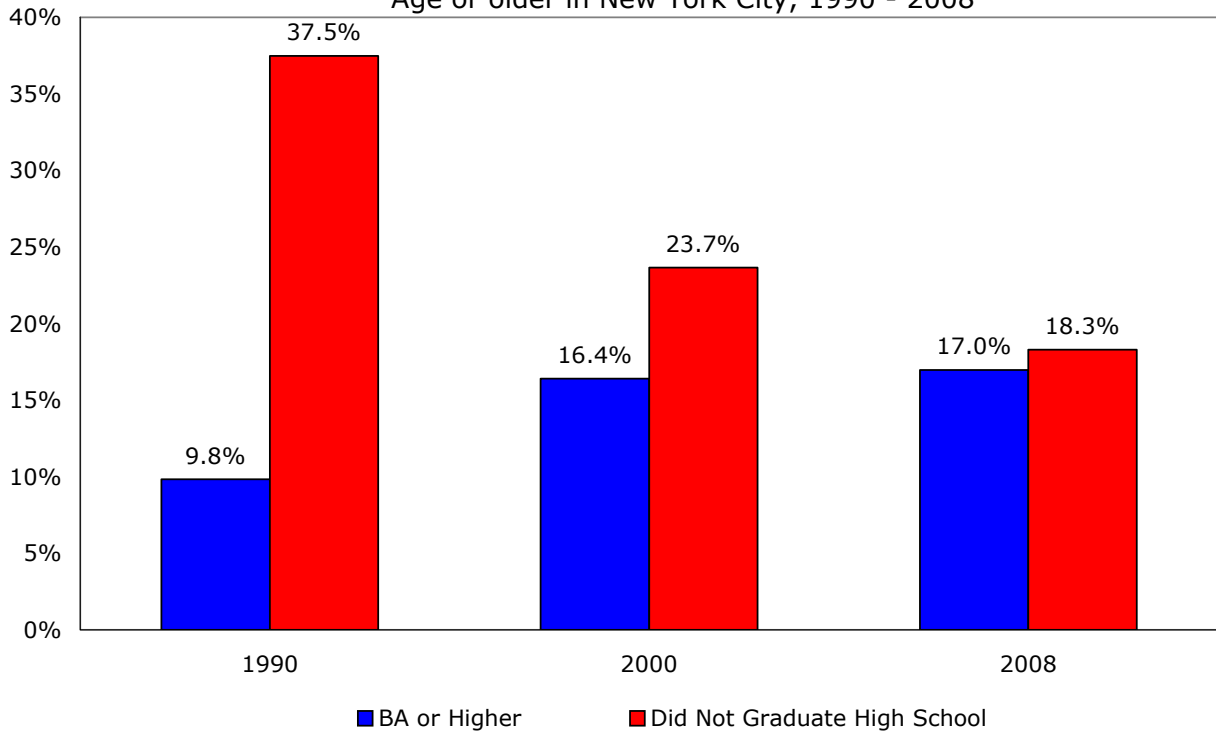
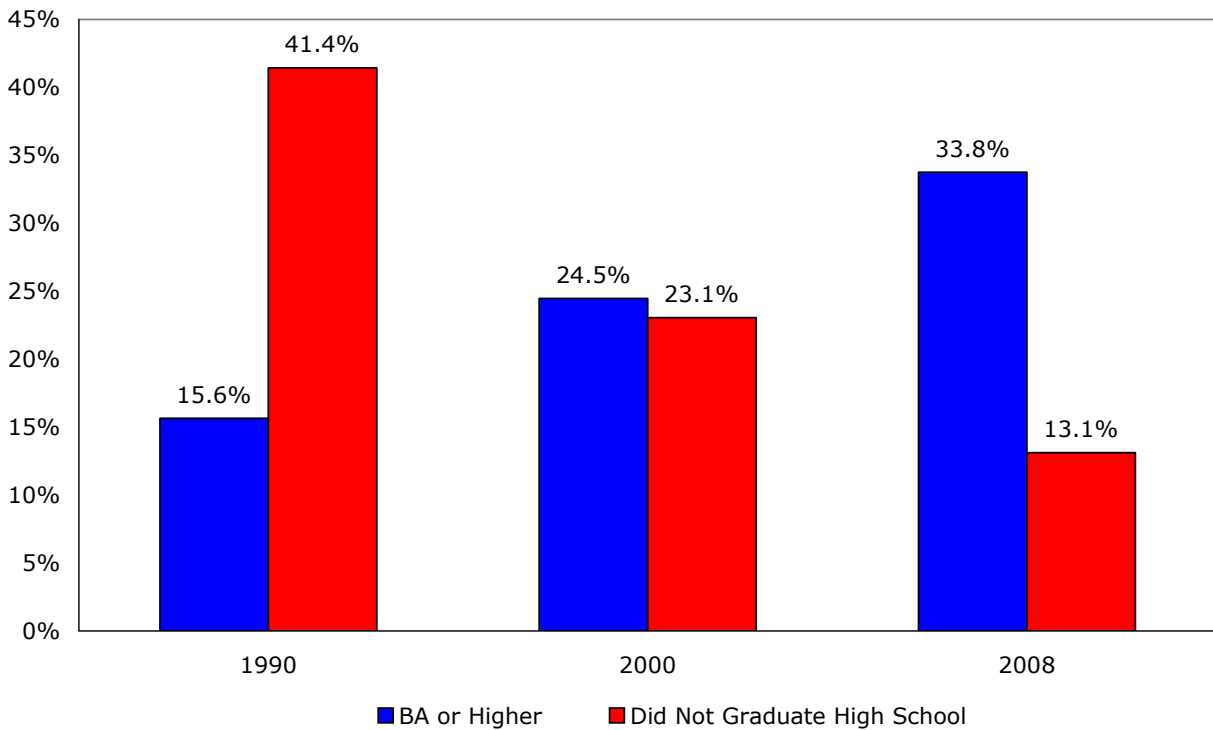


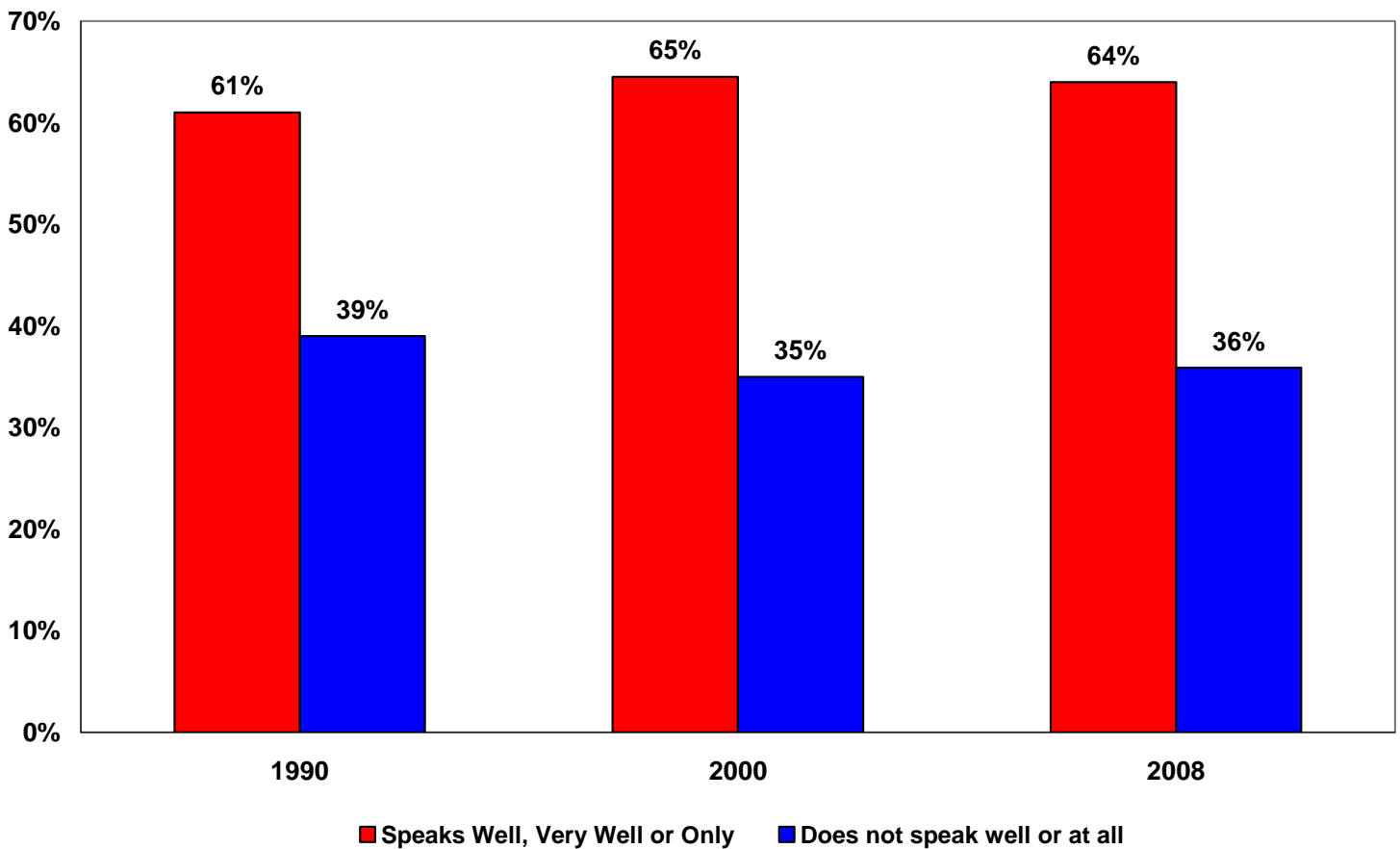
Figure 21  
Educational Attainment for Domestic-Born Dominican Women 25 Years of Age or older in New York City, 1990 - 2008



**English Proficiency**

There was only marginal change in English proficiency levels among Dominicans in New York City between 1990 and 2008 and this was mainly because of the continual arrival of migrants from the Dominican Republic whose English language skills were rudimentary compared with Dominicans who had lived in the U.S. for some time, or those born in the United States. About 42% of all foreign-born Dominicans reported poor English language skills in 2008 and these were people who had not been in the U.S. for a long time period. Some 98% of domestic-born Dominicans reported speaking English exclusively or very well in 1998. Close to two-thirds of all Dominicans in the City reported fairly good English language skills in 2008. (See figure 22). Regardless of whether English skills were good, Dominicans were clearly bi-lingual as was the case with most of the other Latino national sub-groups in New York City. Over 95% of all Dominicans reported speaking Spanish at home in 2008. As the number of domestic-born Dominicans increase overall English language abilities will inevitably improve.

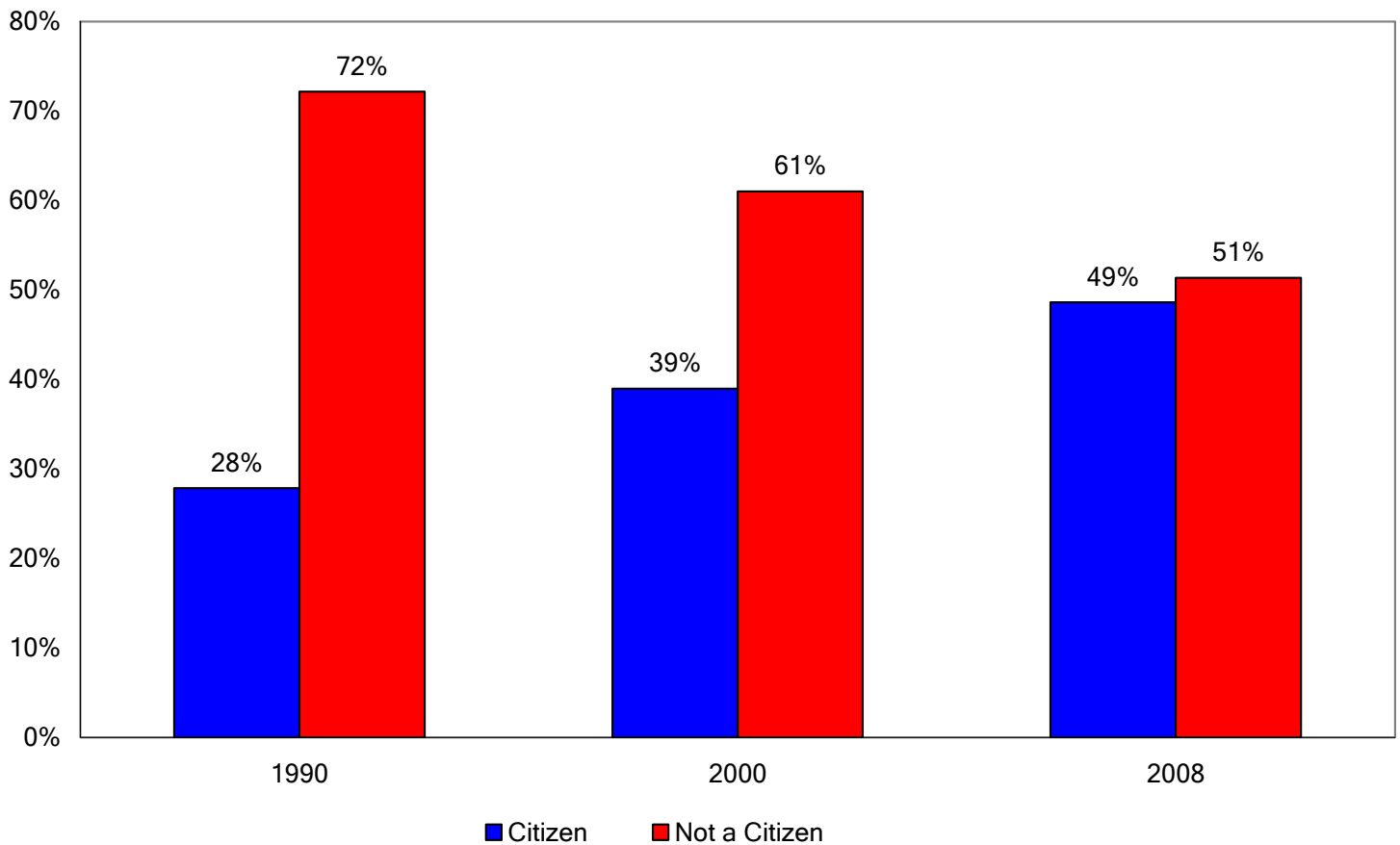
**Figure 22**  
**English Language Proficiency Among**  
**Dominicans in New York City, 1990-2008**



**Citizenship**

In 2008, 49 percent of Dominicans were U.S. citizens. The proportion of Dominicans holding citizenship increased dramatically over the years (see figure 23.) The rise in citizenship rates has important implications in the political arena of New York City. As more Dominicans reach voting age and obtain citizenship, they comprise a larger proportion of the electorate and are in a better position to influence public policy. The number of Dominicans who are citizens and who eventually register to vote when they reach the age of 18 will only increase in the future.

Figure 23  
 Citizenship Status Among Foreign-Born Dominicans in New York City, 1990-2008



## Summary

Based on our research we can point to the following major findings with respect to the Dominican population in New York City:

- The Dominican population has increased dynamically between 1990 and 2008 and we project continued, albeit slower, growth until 2050. However, clearly immigration declined after 1990 and Dominican population growth has been largely because of increases in the domestic-born population. Although domestic-born Dominicans comprised close to 40% of New York City's total Dominican population in 2008, this percentage will constantly increase in the future. The changing ratio of domestic to foreign-born Dominicans will result in important socio-economic changes among the City's Dominican population since those born in the U.S. generally have better educational attainment levels than the foreign born. This implies greater opportunities for upward social mobility.
- The geographic center of the Dominican community has shifted from Northern Manhattan to the Bronx, as the largest proportion of the Dominican population resided in the Bronx by 2008. While Northern Manhattan remains a major residential area for Dominicans, since 1990 the population has gravitated towards areas that historically have been populated by Puerto Ricans, providing greater diversity in these neighborhoods.
- Despite gains between 1990 and 2008, Dominican median household income still ranked lowest among the five largest Latino nationalities in New York City. However, the income gap between domestic-born and foreign-born Dominicans narrowed considerably during the period examined, with households in each group earning roughly the same by 2008.
- Income distribution patterns among Dominicans remained largely unchanged in the time period we examined, which not only points to a clear class structure within the City's Dominican community, but also suggests the presence of structural barriers that have limited upward social mobility. This may change in the future as domestic-born Dominicans gradually become more numerous than immigrant Dominicans.
- Despite persistently low median household incomes and limited upward economic mobility, poverty rates among both domestic-born and foreign-born Dominicans decreased significantly from 1990 to 2008. As was the case with household income, the poverty gap between domestic-born and foreign-born has narrowed and by 2008 both groups had similar poverty rates. Relative to other major Latino nationalities Dominicans had lower poverty rates than Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, but higher rates than Colombians and Ecuadorians.
- Employment rates among the Dominican working-age population have increased substantially since 1990, due largely to a major increase in the number of women entering the workforce. At the same time a significant number of working-age women remain outside of the work force, particularly among domestic-born Dominican women. This suggests a continued tendency for women to forego labor force participation in order to take on homemaker roles.



- Educational attainment among the City's Dominican population improved considerably between 1990 and 2008. While an extraordinary 61% of all Dominican adults had not completed high school in 1990, this fell to 44% in 2008. The college graduation rate doubled from about 6% of all adults in 1990 to 12% in 2008. Domestic-born women in particular have made great strides in educational attainment, with over one-third completing a Bachelor's degrees or better in 2008. At the same time, the education gap between domestic-born and foreign-born Dominicans has widened substantially from 1990-2008. The gap between domestic-born women and domestic-born men has also increased, which indicates a commitment by second plus generation Dominican women to obtain college-level educations. This trend raises concerns about the prospect for upward socio-economic mobility for Dominican males who do not seek college degrees at the same rates as females.
- English language proficiency among foreign-born Dominicans has remained largely constant from 1990-2008, as approximately two-thirds of Dominican immigrants reporting effective command of the language. This will increase in the future as the domestic-born gradually outnumber foreign-born Dominicans.
- Finally the citizenship rates for foreign-born Dominicans have risen significantly from just over one quarter of the immigrant population to nearly half of all foreign-born Dominicans because of naturalization. This rise in citizenship, coupled with the aging and growth of the domestic-born population, means that the Dominican population will have the opportunity to exercise greater political power in New York City and the possibility of expanding their electoral representation at the municipal, state, and possibly federal level in the future. While there will be a constantly increasing Dominican citizen population who will be eligible to vote, increasing political influence will be determined by voter registration and participation rates.