Immigration is an important source of population growth and demographic diversity in the United States. Immigration introduces a more multicultural and multiracial population, as well as linguistic diversity and disparities in education and income. These changes have created social and economic vitality in some respects, but they also have created challenges and are sometimes met with anxiety and backlash. Immigration is a contentious topic in politics, and the U.S. Congress has debated but has not yet passed a comprehensive bill to reform immigration policy. Although much of the attention to immigration has focused on large metropolitan areas and border states such as Arizona and California, immigration has also affected smaller cities and rural areas. Yet immigration has been part of the Manchester history for more than a century. This brief analyzes immigration and refugee resettlement in Manchester and the effects on the city’s demographic composition, as well as the implications for its future.

**Historical Trends in Immigration to Manchester**

Immigration has been an important part of American history as well as that of New Hampshire and Manchester. Figure 1 presents data on the foreign born population of the United States, New Hampshire, and Manchester from 1870 to 2010. These data are from the decennial census and rely on U.S. Census Bureau definitions. Generally speaking, the term “foreign born” is synonymous with the term “immigrant,” so the data in Figure 1 can be interpreted as the proportion of the population who are immigrants for each of the census years shown. In 2010, approximately 12 percent or around 13,000 of Manchester residents were immigrants.
Immigrants were an important source of labor for Manchester’s industrial economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, until very recently, they constituted a much larger proportion of the population in Manchester than in the state or nation as a whole (Figure 1). In 1890, nearly one-half of Manchester’s population was foreign born. That proportion declined because of changing economics, particularly the closing of Amoskeag Mills in 1935 and an increasingly restrictive national immigration policy. But the immigrant share of the Manchester population remained higher than that of New Hampshire, and the proportion of immigrants in the nation surpassed that of Manchester only in the mid-1980s. After waning for several decades, Manchester’s foreign-born population started to increase in 1990, in sync with the national trend. In fact, if it were not for immigration, the population of Manchester would have declined from 2000 to 2010; all of its growth (+2.4 percent) can be attributed to immigration. While such an increase might seem small, population growth is important for economic expansion. The history of Manchester’s mills and the role immigrants played in the growth of this industry illustrate this point.

**Shifts in the Origins of Manchester’s Immigrants**

Immigrant origins have shifted in Manchester. The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company (also known as Amoskeag Mills) was the largest textile manufacturing company in the world at the turn of the twentieth century, and its demand for labor was intense. Originally, workers came from the farmlands of rural New England, but immigrant workers began to replace the “mill girls” in the 1850s and 1860s. Irish immigrants were followed by...
Germans and Swedes, and in the 1870s Amoskeag Mills began to heavily recruit French Canadians. In 1890, the proportion of foreign-born residents in Manchester’s population peaked, as illustrated in Figure 1. This peak was largely driven by the expansion of the Mills during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Immigration was, therefore, the source of labor for the mills and the source of Manchester’s ethnic diversity in the ensuing decades.

The origins of recent immigrants to Manchester are very different from the origins of those who labored in Amoskeag Mills (Figure 2). Only 30 percent of recent immigrants come from regions that gave Manchester its mill workers (North America and Europe). Today’s immigrants are more likely to come from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

In addition, since 1980, Manchester—as well as other New Hampshire localities—has been a resettlement site for international refugees, part of a program created by the Federal Refugee Act of 1980 that established resettlement sites in all states. According to data from the Office of Minority Health, between 1980 and 2012, almost 6,000 refugees resettled in Manchester. Directly estimating the current proportion of all immigrants in Manchester who are refugees is not possible. Although the data available refer to the number of refugees who arrive each year, some refugees move to other locations after initial resettlement, and these moves are not captured by data collection efforts.

The number of refugees arriving varies each year. To better capture the pattern over time, we present the percentage of total refugees since the beginning of the program by decade (Figure 3). Since the 2010s do not yet include a full decade of data, the total contribution of this most recent decade remains to be seen. As Figure 3 suggests, the rate of resettlement has been fairly steady. About 40 percent of the current total arrived in both the 1990s and in the first decade of the 2000s. If the current pattern for the 2010s holds, the second decade of the 2000s will be about the same as the previous two. The average numbers of resettlements per year for the three most recent decades are, chronologically, 261, 252, and 257, respectively. Therefore, steady—but not increasing—numbers of refugees have been resettling in Manchester since resettlement began in the 1980s.

U.S. Policy on Refugees

The United States has been a home for refugees throughout its history. The current U.S. policy on refugees was created when Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980. This Act placed responsibility for refugee resettlement jointly with the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM) in the Department of State and the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services. The Act also tied the United States’ definition of refugee to the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) definition, which allows the U.S. resettlement program to work in conjunction with programs in other countries.

In 1980, a total of 61,231 UNHCR-designated refugees resettled in 22 resettlement countries. More than 70 percent of these refugees (43,215) resettled in the United States, and more than 90 percent (55,639) of the refugees who resettled in 2011 went to only three countries: the United States, Canada, and Australia. The fact that these three countries are the leaders in refugee resettlement is most likely related to their long histories of significant and relatively open immigration.

In the United States, the administering offices in the Department of State and the Department of Health and Human Services fund and oversee the Refugee Resettlement Program, which is carried out by nine nonprofit resettlement agencies or voluntary agencies. Oversight within the individual states in which refugees are resettling is carried out by state refugee coordinating agencies that manage federal grants to the voluntary agencies and other community-based organizations that provide the services and resources the refugees need. The goal of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program is for the resettled refugees to “achieve self-sufficiency within eight months,” with access to mainstream services an important indicator of self-sufficiency.
However, the origins of immigrants and refugees have changed significantly. In part, this trend reflects longitudinal changes in the origins of immigration streams to the United States. Figure 4 shows origins of Manchester’s immigrant population; Figure 5 shows similar data for the refugee population. In the past thirty years, fewer immigrants have come from Europe or Canada, and more have come from Asia, Africa, and, predominantly, Latin America. For the refugee subset of the immigrant population, there has been a shift away from European origin and an increase in refugees from Asia (the largest group to arrive in the 2010s to date, including a substantial number of Bhutanese), and from Africa, and the Middle East (including a number of refugees from Iraq). Similar to the nation and the rest of New Hampshire, Manchester’s Latin American-born population has increased substantially, constituting the largest segment of the foreign-born population in the city in 2010 (29 percent). Yet, as indicated in Figure 5, no refugees have come from Latin America.

Immigration Contributes to Manchester’s Diversity and Younger Population

There are important opportunities associated with the growth of the immigrant population. Manchester is more diverse and younger than the population in the rest of New Hampshire, largely as a result of immigration. New Hampshire is a relatively homogeneous state, with a minority population of only 8 percent. Compared to the state, Manchester is considerably more racially and ethnically diverse but less so than
Differences Persist Between Foreign and Native-Born Populations

Significant disparities between the foreign- and native-born populations create challenges for their social and economic integration. In Manchester and across the country, these include education, poverty, and language differences. If the city is to embrace fully the potential benefits of immigration for future economic well-being, it must attend to these integration challenges.

Educational differences between these two populations are pronounced (Figure 8), particularly at the lowest and highest levels of educational attainment. The considerable educational disadvantage among the foreign born creates more struggles for their financial well-being and economic mobility.

Although the majority of immigrants older than age 25 have at least a high school diploma, the considerable educational disadvantage among the foreign born creates more struggles for their financial well-being and economic mobility. Lower levels of education are highly...
correlated with poverty, unemployment, and underemployment; therefore, closing the education gap remains imperative for the well-being of all of Manchester’s population, not only the foreign born. Increases in educational attainment would help to ensure increased economic vitality and a broader tax base, leading to improved infrastructure and amenities, such as schools, in all neighborhoods.

In direct contrast, a large percentage of immigrants in Manchester, New Hampshire, and the United States have advanced degrees. In Manchester, 10 percent of the foreign-born population has a graduate or professional degree, compared with 8 percent of the native-born population. With recent growth in jobs in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, the educational advantage among the foreign-born population with advanced degrees may put them at an advantage to compete for jobs in these fields.

Poverty is also more prevalent among the foreign born, although the gap is smaller than the gap in education; 17 percent of the foreign born live below the poverty line in Manchester, compared with 13 percent of the native born (Figure 9). This poverty gap has narrowed since 2000 because of increasing poverty among the native born, partly attributable to the Great Recession and, perhaps, because of higher-income families moving to Manchester’s suburbs.

A third difference is the language diversity among immigrants. Manchester has always been linguistically diverse. Given the history of French Canadian immigration to the city, both French and
English were commonly spoken throughout Manchester until well past the mid-twentieth century. In some neighborhoods—particularly on the city’s West Side—the French language predominated, and in the past, English could be heard only sparingly in certain parts of the city. Today the city is even more linguistically diverse. In Hillsborough County, home to Manchester, a wide gap in English fluency separates foreign- and native-born residents (Figure 10). Among foreign-born non-Hispanic whites, only approximately 40 percent speak English “less than very well,” compared with nearly 70 percent of foreign-born Hispanics, almost 60 percent of foreign-born blacks, and one-half of foreign-born Asians. Historically, these disparities tend to narrow with each passing generation. This trend is reflected in Figure 10; regardless of racial or ethnic group, the language barrier is significantly lower for those who are native born, including children of immigrants. Nonetheless, additional policies enhancing language skills will likely ensure smoother transitions for immigrant families.

**Implications for Manchester’s Economic and Social Futures**

Manchester’s immigrant population creates concrete opportunities for growth and vitality through its impact on the age structure of the city and the future workforce this implies, through its contribution to cultural diversity, and through its additions to an otherwise declining population base.

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**FIGURE 8. EDUCATION LEVEL BY FOREIGN-BORN STATUS FOR ADULTS 25 AND OLDER (CITY OF MANCHESTER), 2007–2011**

*Source: American Community Survey (2011), 5-Year Estimates*

**FIGURE 9. PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN- AND NATIVE-BORN BELOW POVERTY, MANCHESTER NH, 2007–2011**

*Source: American Community Survey (2011) 5-Year Estimates and 2000 Decennial Census*
The social and economic differences between the immigrant and native populations create challenges, at least in the short-term, and the city must deal with these challenges in order to fully realize the potential opportunities. Investment in infrastructure, especially the city’s schools, is critical for educating and integrating the immigrant population, and such investment would benefit all of Manchester’s youth, and, by implication, the city as a whole. Support for the immigrant population, including its refugee component, is equally critical, and the important work of nonprofit organizations such as Catholic Charities, the International Institute of New England, New American Africans, and the Bhutanese Association is exemplary of efforts to include immigrants in the life of the city.

Evidence on immigrant integration elsewhere in the United States points to the importance of opportunities for increased contact between the foreign and native born.11 There is also good evidence in the research literature that the response of local leaders, citizens, and stakeholders to the challenges we have described can make a real difference in the ultimate impact of immigration to the city.12 Responses that emphasize the problems faced by immigrants can lead to divisiveness, while efforts that concentrate on inclusiveness and integration can promote the contributions immigrants make to the social and economic fabric of a community.

Manchester has always been the home of immigrants because it has been the center of business and industry in the state. The opportunities for continuing in this role depend on its success in welcoming, supporting, and educating the newcomers.
Endnotes


2. We refer to the Manchester metropolitan area because the focus of the brief is Manchester. Technically, the metropolitan area is the Manchester-Nashua metropolitan area.

3. In 2000, the population of Manchester was 107,006; in 2010, it was 109,565, an increase of 2,559. During this same time period, the foreign-born population increased from 10,035 to 12,929, an increase of 2,894. If not for this increase, the population in Manchester would have decreased by 335, or -0.3 percent.


5. Refugees have settled in eighty-four towns throughout the state. Manchester, Concord, Laconia, and Nashua have had the largest number of refugees since the official program began in 1980.

6. Figures are based on the American Community Survey 2008–2012 estimates. The minority figures refer to the population that is Hispanic and/or non-white.

7. According to the American Community Survey five-year estimates, 2007–2011, the state of New Hampshire has a median age of 40.7, and Manchester City has a median age of 36.1.

8. Credit for these age pyramids goes to Luke Rogers, research assistant at the Carsey Institute.


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