

## **Question**

Are birth rates higher among foreign-born or native-born women? Which groups have a higher birth rate in King County and Pierce County, WA?

## **Issues with Data**

The census data on birth rates of foreign-born birth rates may be non-representative of the true birth rates among foreign born. This is because many undocumented immigrants are undercounted in the decennial census. So, true totals of foreign-born births would be inflated due to illegal migration.<sup>ii</sup>

## **Relevance of the Question**

The literature below from the U.S. Census Bureau provides socioeconomic data on foreign-born versus native-born populations. Findings from the Census Bureau indicate that foreign-born populations earn less, are more impoverished, and have lower educational attainment than native-born populations. These findings may be similar to the socioeconomic characteristics of foreign-born populations in King and Pierce County, WA. A cartographic comparison between foreign-born and native-born women in King and Pierce County would therefore be useful, as it could indicate which populations are in greater need of government assistance or other types of benefits.

The second piece of literature below supports the claim that the birth rates of babies being born to foreign-born women is tied to the highly debated topic of immigration. High birth

rates among foreign-born population brings up many negative associations, as some believe that immigrants will “overtake” native populations.

According to a study by (Shmidley, 2003) from the Census Bureau, the foreign born earn less than natives. A ‘Current Population Survey’ from the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that 31.1 percent of foreign-born full-time workers and 17.4 percent of native workers earned less than \$20,000 in 2001. Out of the foreign-born workers, the proportions earning less than \$20,000 ranged from 47.4 percent of those from Central America to 14.9 percent from Europe and 17.9 percent from Asia. 28.8 percent of native workers earned \$50,000 or more compared with 21.3 percent of foreign-born workers.

The foreign born are more likely than natives to live in poverty, according to (Shmidley, 2003). In 2001, 16 percent of the foreign-born population lived below the poverty level, compared with 11 percent of natives in the United States. Foreign-born people who were non-citizens were twice as likely to be poor than foreign-born naturalized citizens, as 19.7 percent lived in poverty compared with 9.9 percent of foreign-born naturalized citizens who lived in poverty.

In addition, educational attainment among foreign-born populations are lower compared to native-born populations, according to (Shmidley, 2003). Foreign-born populations aged 25 and over were less likely to have graduated high school (67.2 percent) than natives the same age (86.9 percent). In addition, more than one-fifth of the foreign-born had less than a ninth-grade education, compared to roughly one-twentieth of the native population.<sup>i</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century there has been changes in foreign fertility patterns, particularly with recent increases in levels of immigration from countries with high fertility. Glusker (2003) points out that birth rates of foreign born compared to native born relates to the

topic of immigration, as immigration has been a recurrent topic of popular and political debate, as well as scholarly inquiry. In addition, the debate on immigration often overlaps with fears relating to overpopulation and the changing population composition of the United States. Specifically, In the early twentieth century there were widespread concerns about poor immigrant “quality” and assumptions that high immigrant fertility discouraged fertility among the native-born. These assumptions are very much alive today, as some worry about the immigrant “quality” from Latin American countries.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Contextualizing the Question**

Contextualizing the research question conceptually means explaining the importance of measuring birth rates. The birth rate is an important measure as it affects public policy and budgeting for education and healthcare systems. In the public realm, governments, policymakers, and the news media are concerned with birth rates, as birth rates are viewed as being either too high or too low.<sup>iii</sup>

To contextualize the research question further, definitions of main terms are explained.

-Foreign born: The Census Bureau defines foreign born as anyone who is not a citizen of the U.S. at birth. This definition includes naturalized U.S. citizens, immigrants, temporary migrants, refugees and asylees, and unauthorized migrants.

-Native born: The Census Bureau defines native or native born as anyone in the U.S., Puerto Rico, a U.S. Island Area, or of a U.S. citizen parent or parents.<sup>iv</sup>

-Birth rate: number of live births per 1,000 of population per year

-Fertility rate: the number of live births per 1,000 women of childbearing age generally ages 15 to 44.<sup>v</sup>

-Educational Attainment: defined as the highest grade completed in the educational system within a selected population. In this case, births in the past year per 1,000 women whose educational attainment equals less than a high school diploma.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Shmidley, Dianne, 2003, *The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: March 2002*, Current Population Reports, P20-539, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

United States Census Bureau. "Foreign Born."

<sup>ii</sup> Glusker, Ann I. *Fertility Patterns of Native- and Foreign-born Women: Assimilating to Diversity*. New Americans (LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC). New York: LFB Scholarly Pub., 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> PRB. "Distilled Demographics: The Birth Rate." <https://www.prb.org/distilleddemographics3/> (Accessed March 8, 2019).

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<sup>iv</sup> United States Census Bureau. "Foreign Born." [https://www.census.gov/topics/population/foreign-born/about.html#par\\_textimage](https://www.census.gov/topics/population/foreign-born/about.html#par_textimage) (Accessed March 8, 2019).

<sup>v</sup> National Geographic. "Fertility." <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/fertility/> (Accessed March 8, 2019).

<sup>vi</sup> United States Census Bureau. "Educational Attainment." <https://www.census.gov/topics/education/educational-attainment.html>. (Accessed March 8, 2019).