

## Four Trends That Shape The City's Political Landscape

by {ga=abeveridge}

Wednesday, May 25, 2005 12:00 AM

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Â The election of [Antonio Villaraigosa](#) as Mayor of Los Angeles encouraged Fernando Ferrer's campaign to rally [Hispanic support](#) . But it is not a strange kind of vanity that turned Michael Bloomberg into Miguel in some recent ads, as the billionaire's mayoral campaign started in earnest with [television commercials in Spanish](#) .

New York City is not like Los Angeles, where nearly 85 percent of all Hispanics are Mexican. There is a dizzyingly diverse mix of Hispanic immigrants in New York, and the various groups may not all respond to one ethnic appeal.

This diverse wave of immigrants to the city is one of four demographic trends that define New York City's unique political landscape, all of which the candidates must understand, even if they have little power to change them.

### Immigrant Waves

New York City's recent population growth was fueled by immigration. Without it, the city's population would not be near eight million. "Without the immigrants," Mitchell Moss has said, "New York City would be Detroit," a city whose population is lower now than it was in 1930.

During the 1990s New York City continued to draw large numbers of immigrants with a variety of backgrounds, [origins and economic status](#) . Unlike virtually every other immigrant area in the United States, immigrants to New York City come from many different places:

- older European countries such as Russia, Italy and Poland;
- the Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Haiti;
- Asia, including China, Korea, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India;
- Central and South America, including Mexico, Ecuador and Colombia.

Some of these groups are better educated than others; some gravitate to the professions; some are self-employed. The economic status, family status and ratio of male to female vary widely from group to group. The immigrants in New York City today are much more segregated from the rest of the population and from other immigrant groups than were immigrants at the turn of

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the 20th century, and even groups from the same nation often gravitate to different locations.

Mayor Rudy Giuliani once remarked that he loved all immigrants, legal or illegal, but in recent years New York City, along with the rest of the country, has reversed that inclusive sentiment. After 9/11, the climate for undocumented foreign born, foreign students and foreign workers in New York City (as elsewhere) has worsened. Entering the country, either legally or illegally has become much more difficult, and undocumented immigrants have a harder time living here since they can no longer open bank accounts or obtain driver's licenses. It is possible that the immigrant waves have now slowed.

### **Racial Segregation and the Black Middle Class**

The African Americans in New York City are [highly segregated](#) from other groups. Within this segregation, there is a burgeoning black middle class in South Eastern Queens as well parts of the Northeast Bronx and recently the beginnings of one in parts of Harlem. Blacks in Queens have incomes at least on par with the whites living there, and the neighborhoods around St. Albans, Cambria and Laurelton are especially affluent and virtually 100 percent black. These areas contain highly mobilized and affluent potential supporters for any mayoral campaign. Many candidates have already recognized this constituency and sometimes visit the black churches in Queens on Sunday mornings in search of votes and contributions.

### **Rising Income Inequality**

Areas of wealth exist around the boroughs, but New York City and especially Manhattan remain economically stratified with [income inequality](#) dwarfing that of most third world countries. Neighbors and peers of Michael Bloomberg in the Upper East Side zip code of 10021 supplied the most political donations to both the Bush and Kerry campaigns in 2004 of any zip code in the country. The rich folks constituting the top 20 percent of Manhattan have about 50 times the income (over \$350,000 on average) of the poor folks in the bottom 20 percent. Income inequality within the very small geographic area of Manhattan is a growing trend, and it seems there is little New York City can do about it.

### **Middle Class Exodus of People and Jobs**

Many people of the middle and upper middle class are moving outside of New York City into the New York metropolitan area. The movement of people and jobs undoubtedly increased in the aftermath of 9/11, but the trend began in earnest [after World War II](#), especially the more affluent who sought employment, housing, city services and improved quality of life outside of city limits.

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New York City is increasingly the home of the foreign-born, as well as native-born African Americans and Hispanics. Such residents, in fact, are more and more in need of primary, secondary and higher education, decent health care, reasonable employment, public transportation, etc. While the wealthy take care of themselves and the middle class leave New York City, new residents and those on the bottom become the core recipients of vital city services and those most affected by changes to them. Yet, the city struggles to fulfill these needs, despite its disproportionate tax burden. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity school funding case, the abolition of the commuter tax, the crumbling city infrastructure and the big development plans both for Ground Zero and for the West Side contribute to the impression that New York City residents and their needs are subordinate to the interests of suburban and upstate residents.

It may not matter much whether Gifford Miller, Anthony Weiner, Virginia Field, Freddy Ferrer or Michael Bloomberg is elected, or which ethnic, immigrant or racial groups the candidates mobilize. New York City's needs will remain the same, and these same four trends will continue to shape the issues. Managing or overcoming the negative impacts of these trends will prove a daunting task for the next mayor, whoever that turns out to be.

[Andrew A. Beveridge](#) has taught sociology at Queens College since 1981, done demographic analyses for the New York Times since 1993, and provides expert testimony on a range of cases, including housing discrimination. The opinions expressed are his alone.

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