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*2015 Working Paper Series*

**FERTILITY DIFFERENTIALS ACROSS RACE-ETHNICITY  
AND GENERATIONAL STATUS IN THE UNITED STATES:  
INCORPORATING NON-HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **BACKGROUND**

Fertility research on nativity and generations has largely focused on Hispanics, but rising rates of immigration from other parts of the world warrant greater attention to the fertility of non-Hispanics.

### **OBJECTIVE**

To assess potential quantum and timing variation in fertility across race-ethnicity and nativity-generation by examining (1) completed fertility among women 40–44, (2) the proportion of women 18–24 with at least one child, and (3) the age at last birth among mothers 40–44.

### **METHODS**

We use six waves (2000–2010) of the June Fertility Supplement of the Current Population Survey to examine fertility among women aged 40–44 ( $N=31,080$ ), women 18–24 ( $N=34,620$ ), and mothers aged 40–44 ( $N=25,224$ ).

### **RESULTS**

Foreign-born Mexican women aged 40–44 have considerably higher completed fertility compared to both other foreign-born women and later generations of Mexicans, though differences decline across generations. There are significantly more mothers among late-arriving (age 12 or later) Mexican women aged 18–24 than other late-arriving groups or other generations. For age at last birth, the foreign-born tend to have older ages than subsequent generations, with Asians standing out as having older ages at last birth overall.

### **CONCLUSION**

Foreign-born Mexicans exhibit unique fertility patterns relative to other race-ethnic and generation groups, and there is some evidence of differential patterns of intergenerational change among Asians. This suggests the shifts in the sending-country composition of U.S. immigrants has implications for future population composition.

## **1. Introduction**

Hispanics, the largest minority group in the U.S., appear to exhibit unique fertility behaviors, particularly among the foreign-born (Parrado 2011). As such, research on immigrant fertility often focuses on Hispanics, predominantly Mexicans. We know far less about the fertility of other immigrants, a serious omission given that non-Hispanics account for nearly half of the foreign-born population, and Asians recently surpassed Hispanics as the largest group of new immigrants (Pew Research Center 2012).

The fertility of immigrants and minorities has long been an interest to demographers as an indicator of integration into mainstream society (Goldscheider and Uhlenberg 1969).

Assimilation research among Hispanics generally finds that fertility declines across generations (Parrado and Morgan 2008), though others are skeptical (Bean, Swicegood, and Berg 2000). The limited and dated literature on non-Hispanic immigrants suggests different fertility and assimilation patterns (e.g., Bachu and O'Connell 1984; Blau 1992; Kahn 1988). For instance, it appears that intergenerational patterns hold more strongly for European than Hispanic immigrants (Ford 1990), and Asian groups appear to adopt lower fertility norms more quickly than other groups (Kahn 1988).

Another issue is concern over how to measure fertility among immigrants and across race-ethnic groups. In 2011, the total fertility rate (TFR) ranged from 1.17 for Asian women to 2.24 for Hispanic-origin women (Martin et al. 2013), but if immigrants have a different age profile, exhibit differences in fertility timing relative to the native-born population, or comprise a larger proportion of some race-ethnic groups than others, the TFR— a hypothetical number based on age-specific fertility rates— will overestimate actual fertility (Parrado 2011; Parrodo and Flippen 2012). As such, completed fertility may be a more accurate indicator of fertility behavior (Parrado 2011), though it, too, is imperfect. Much of the change in overall U.S. fertility

over the last several decades can be attributed to changes in timing (Preston and Hartnett 2010), yet completed fertility provides little information about the fertility behaviors of younger cohorts (Parrado and Flippen 2012). Thus tempo fertility indicators are informative as well.

This study uses data from six waves of the June Fertility Supplement of the Current Population Survey to answer two questions. First, we ask whether there are race-ethnic and nativity-generation differences in completed fertility. Second, we assess whether quantum differences in completed fertility are mirrored in tempo differences in childbearing, examining the proportion of women 18–24 who are mothers and age at most recent birth among women 40–44.

## **2. Data and Method**

This study uses six waves of the Current Population Survey (CPS) June Fertility Supplement (a biannual nationally representative sample of American households), from 2000 to 2010. The unique advantage of the CPS data is it contains large sample sizes of race-ethnic groups by nativity, though certain combinations (namely, second-generation blacks and Asians) remain fairly small. In the supplement, women aged 15–44 are asked the following: (1) “How many children have you had?” and “What is the date of birth of your last child?” Complete fertility histories and information on the timing of first birth are not collected.

We have three fertility indicators. First, we use the number of children among women aged 40–44 to proxy completed fertility ( $n = 31,080$ ). Second, we measure the proportion of women aged 18–24 who have any children to proxy entry into childbearing ( $n = 34,620$ ). Finally, we use the age at most recent birth among mothers aged 40–44 to proxy the end of childbearing ( $n=25,224$ ).

For each of these measures, we present descriptive figures by race-ethnicity and generational status; we do not show statistical significance in the figures but mention it in the text when appropriate. Our race-ethnic categories are non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Mexican, other Hispanic, and Asian; there are too few cases to further disaggregate within the other Hispanic or Asian groups. We further identify nativity and a degree of generational status. Respondents report whether they were born outside of the U.S., as well as their parents' country of birth. Using this information, we created three generational groups for women aged 40–44: foreign-born (FB), children of foreign-born parents (CFB), and children of native-born parents (CNB). The first two groups correspond with the traditional terms of “first generation” and “second generation.” The last group, children of native-born parents, is a more heterogeneous group, including both those who could be categorized as “third generation” (i.e., grandchildren of immigrants) and those whose ancestors have been in the U.S. for several generations. Among the 18–24, for whom we have larger sample sizes, we are able to further disaggregate the foreign-born by approximate age at arrival. We distinguish between those who arrive prior to age 12 and those who arrive at age 12 or later, a boundary consistent with other studies (Rumbaut 2004). We use the terms foreign-born early arrival (FB, EA) and foreign-born late arrival (FB, LA), respectively. Age of arrival is calculated from the survey year, the respondent's age, and her reported year of arrival in the U.S.

### **3. Results**

Figure 1 presents completed fertility estimates for women 40–44 across race-ethnicity, within generational status. Overall, foreign-born (FB) women have more children than both the children of the foreign-born (CFB) and children of the native-born (CNB), at 2.14 children versus 1.80 and 1.85 children, respectively. Mexican women, regardless of generation, have

higher completed fertility than all other race-ethnic and nativity-generation groups. Among foreign-born women, Mexican women's fertility is significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from all other race-ethnic groups; all groups' fertility differs significantly from non-Hispanic white women except for Asian women, and all groups differ significantly from black women except for other Hispanics. Among the children of the foreign-born, the major difference is between Mexican and non-Hispanic white women, with smaller differences between Mexican and other Hispanics. Among the children of the native-born, Mexican women have significantly higher completed fertility than every group except other Hispanic women (the latter difference being marginally significant at  $p = .056$ ), but the magnitude of the difference between Mexicans and other women is substantially smaller than among the foreign-born. Completed fertility among black women is also significantly higher than among non-Hispanic white women, although this difference is not substantively large. Comparing within race-ethnic groups across generational status, it appears that much of the higher fertility among Mexicans is driven by the fertility of the foreign-born, consistent with prior research. All groups exhibit a decline in completed fertility between the foreign-born and the children of the foreign-born, but the decline is particularly large among Mexicans. However, Mexicans are the only group that does not exhibit an increase in completed fertility between the children of the foreign-born and the children of the native-born.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 2 shows the weighted percent of women ages 18–24 who have had any children, by race-ethnicity within generational status. The data follow a pattern similar to completed fertility. Differences are largest for the foreign-born late arrivals (FB, LA) compared to the other generations, with Mexican women again standing out. Among those who immigrated as young children and those born in the U.S. to immigrant parents, differences between Mexicans, other

Hispanics, and blacks are no longer significant in terms of the proportion of young women who already have children, and the differences between Asians and non-Hispanic whites are attenuated. Both Mexican foreign-born early arrivals and the children of immigrants have significantly higher proportions of young mothers relative to whites and Asians despite the decline across generation groups. In the last group, children of the native-born, a larger proportion of both black and Mexican women are already parents relative to other groups. Looking within race-ethnic groups across generation, results dovetail with other work finding declines across early generations but increases in the third or later generation for most race-ethnic groups. For Mexican, other Hispanic, non-Hispanic white, and black immigrants, the proportion who had a child among those aged 18–24 is highest among the foreign-born late arrivals, whereas fewer early-arriving young women are mothers. Early parenthood is lowest among the children of the foreign-born. The exception to the general pattern are Asians, who exhibit a higher proportion who have had children among the foreign-born early arrivals than among either the foreign-born later arrivals or the children of foreign-born parents. All groups, however, demonstrate an increase in the proportion of young women who are mothers for the children of the native-born relative to the children of the foreign-born.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Finally, in Figure 3 we present a similar descriptive figure of age at most recent birth among mothers aged 40–44. The general pattern is that age at most recent birth declines across generations, with the oldest ages at last birth among the foreign-born. As with the proportion of young mothers, Asian women are an exception; they display the highest age at last birth across nativity-generation groups, with an increase among between the foreign-born and the children of

the foreign-born followed by a decline among the children of the native-born (though the absolute level among the latter group remains higher than among the foreign-born).

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

#### **4. Discussion**

The goal of this study was to compare both race-ethnic and nativity-generation groups, as immigrant research has predominantly focused on Hispanic, particularly Mexican, immigrants. We find differences across different race-ethnic groups within generation groups, with the association strongest for the foreign-born. Our results suggest that there is something unique about the fertility of Mexican-born women in the United States. Compared to other race-ethnic groups, foreign-born Mexican women exhibit higher overall completed fertility, stemming from what appears to be an earlier entry into parenthood but comparable ages for the end of childbearing to non-Hispanic whites. By the next generation—native-born children of immigrant parents—differences between Mexicans and other groups are reduced across all the fertility measures. Additionally, though there is no evidence of quantum differences in completed fertility between Asians and other groups, Asians exhibit some unique differences in the pattern of change across generations in the timing of childbearing.

Differences in completed fertility between Mexicans and other groups decline but still remain across subsequent generations. Similarly, the differences attenuate across the first three generational groups in the proportion of young mothers, though Mexicans remain statistically different than whites and Asians, and there is some evidence that intergenerational shifts in fertility stagnate or reverse by the third or later generation. However, there are no significant differences in age at last birth among the children of the native-born between Mexicans, other Hispanics, and non-Hispanic whites, with Asians standing out as having a high age at last birth



across generation groups. We take this as evidence that some of the unique factors boosting fertility among Mexicans diminish, but do not entirely disappear by the next generation, as exposure to American society—and American fertility norms—occurs. Although the CPS fertility data do not provide age at first birth, reconciling age at last birth with completed fertility among older women and the proportion of young women with children suggests that the higher fertility of foreign-born women is related to a longer period of childbearing, while women with native-born parents may begin later and stop earlier.

We do not find evidence that all race-ethnic groups experience the same intergenerational patterns of fertility. Only Mexicans experience declines in completed fertility across the first and second generation but no change between the children of the foreign-born and the children of the native-born. Patterns of early parenthood do not change across generation for Mexicans, yet they exhibit an earlier end to childbearing across subsequent generations. This suggests that part of the decline, then, in completed fertility may be that Mexican women continue to have children at younger ages but cease childbearing at earlier ages across generations. Other race-ethnic groups experience a decline in completed fertility between the foreign-born and their children followed by an increase for the children of the native-born; the fact that this occurs among other Hispanics and Asians suggests it is not necessarily an artifact of the more heterogeneous nature of the latter category. Interestingly, among Asian women, we see that subsequent generations are more likely to have a child at young ages, yet there are no significant differences in completed fertility or the age at most recent birth across generations (though the age at most recent birth remains significantly higher than other groups for all generations).

This study has several limitations. This study cannot capture generational change *per se* since we are using cross-sectional data, and our generational categories are imperfect—the

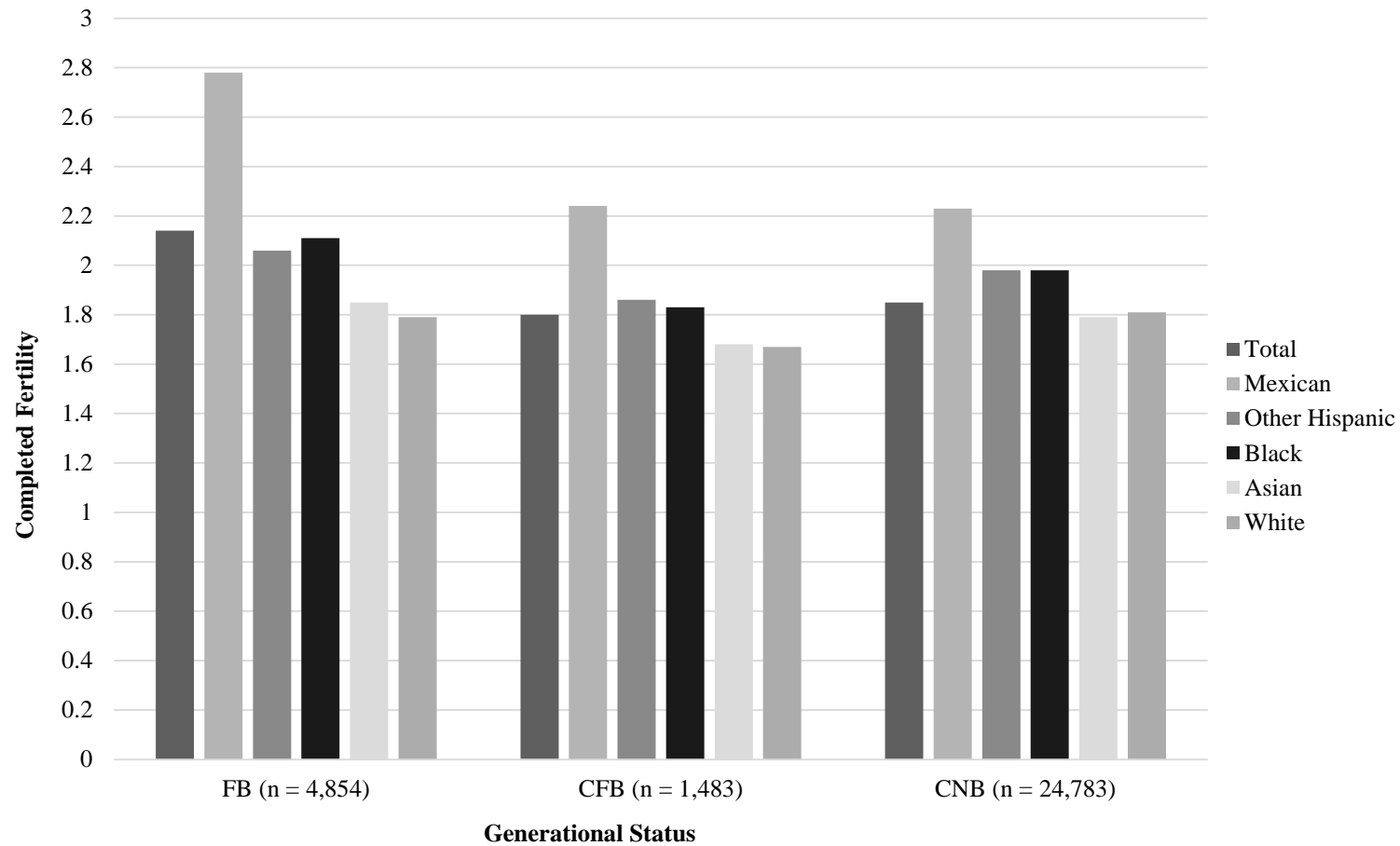
children of the native-born category, specifically, is broader than just the third generation, particularly among black and white non-Hispanics. Our findings regarding generational differences in fertility should be taken with caution with respect to 40–44-year-old black and Asian women due to small sample sizes among the children of foreign-born parents. We were unable to further disaggregate within the Asian and other Hispanic groups. Finally, we are unable to make any statements about causality and the underlying mechanisms at play, as we lacked information about the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of individuals prior to migration and childbearing as well as information about the social context of sending and receiving destinations.

Overall, our findings suggest that there is something unique about the childbearing behaviors of Mexican immigrant women, relative to both Mexican women of later generations and immigrant women from other sending countries. As such, to the extent that immigration from Mexico is declining and immigration from other regions is rising, the role of Hispanic fertility is likely overstated in projections of population growth (Parrado 2011). Immigrants from Asia, Europe, and other Latin American countries have substantially lower completed fertility than Mexican immigrant women, although immigrants from Latin America overall (including Mexico) and Africa do have higher fertility than non-Hispanic white immigrants. Further, we find some evidence of differences intergenerationally in the timing of fertility for Asians relative to other groups. It is likely that the shifting immigrant profile, along with potential differential intergenerational patterns of fertility across groups, will alter future population composition.

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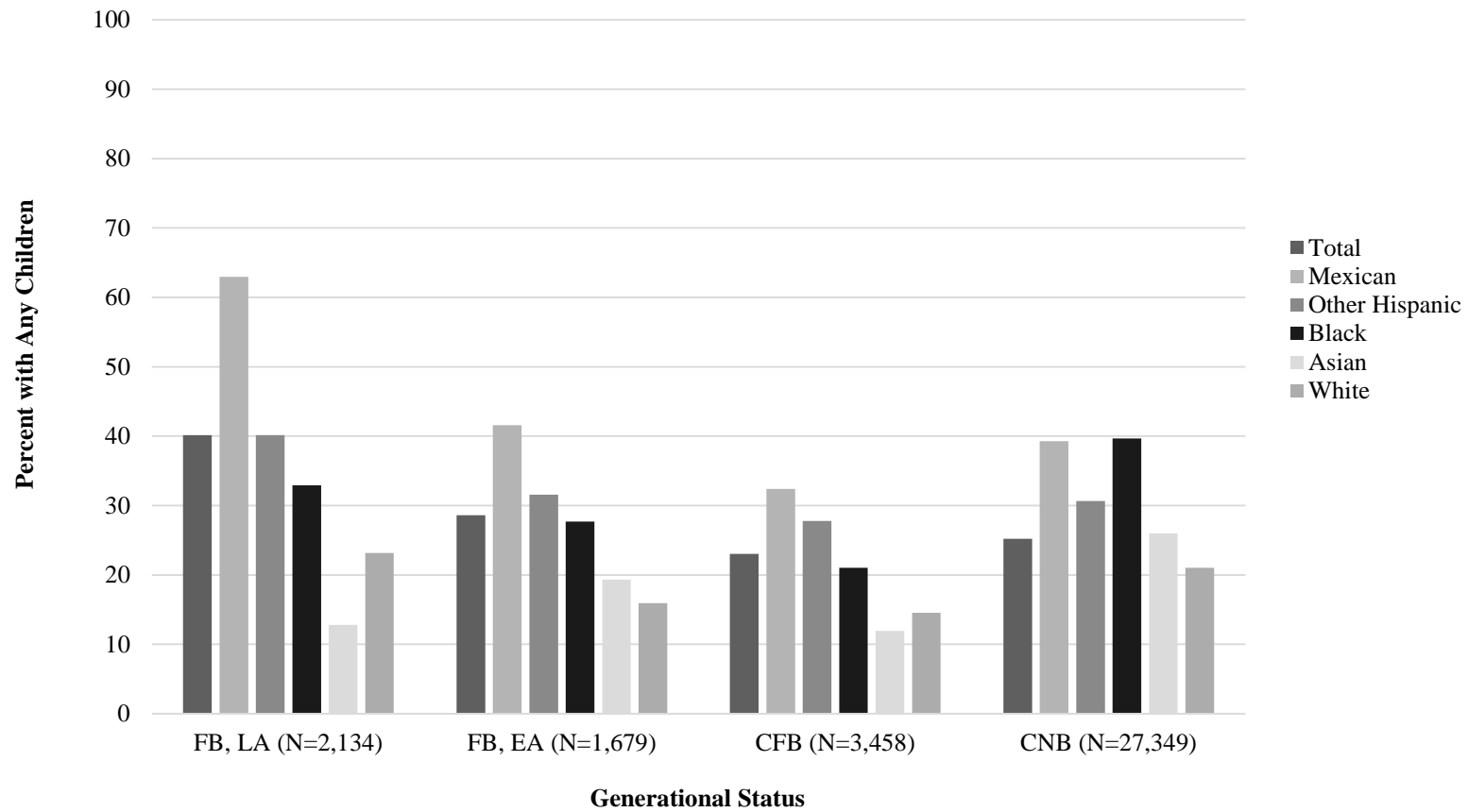
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**Figure 1.**  
**Weighted Mean Number of Children by Race-Ethnicity and**  
**Nativity-Generation, ages 40–44 (N = 31,080)**



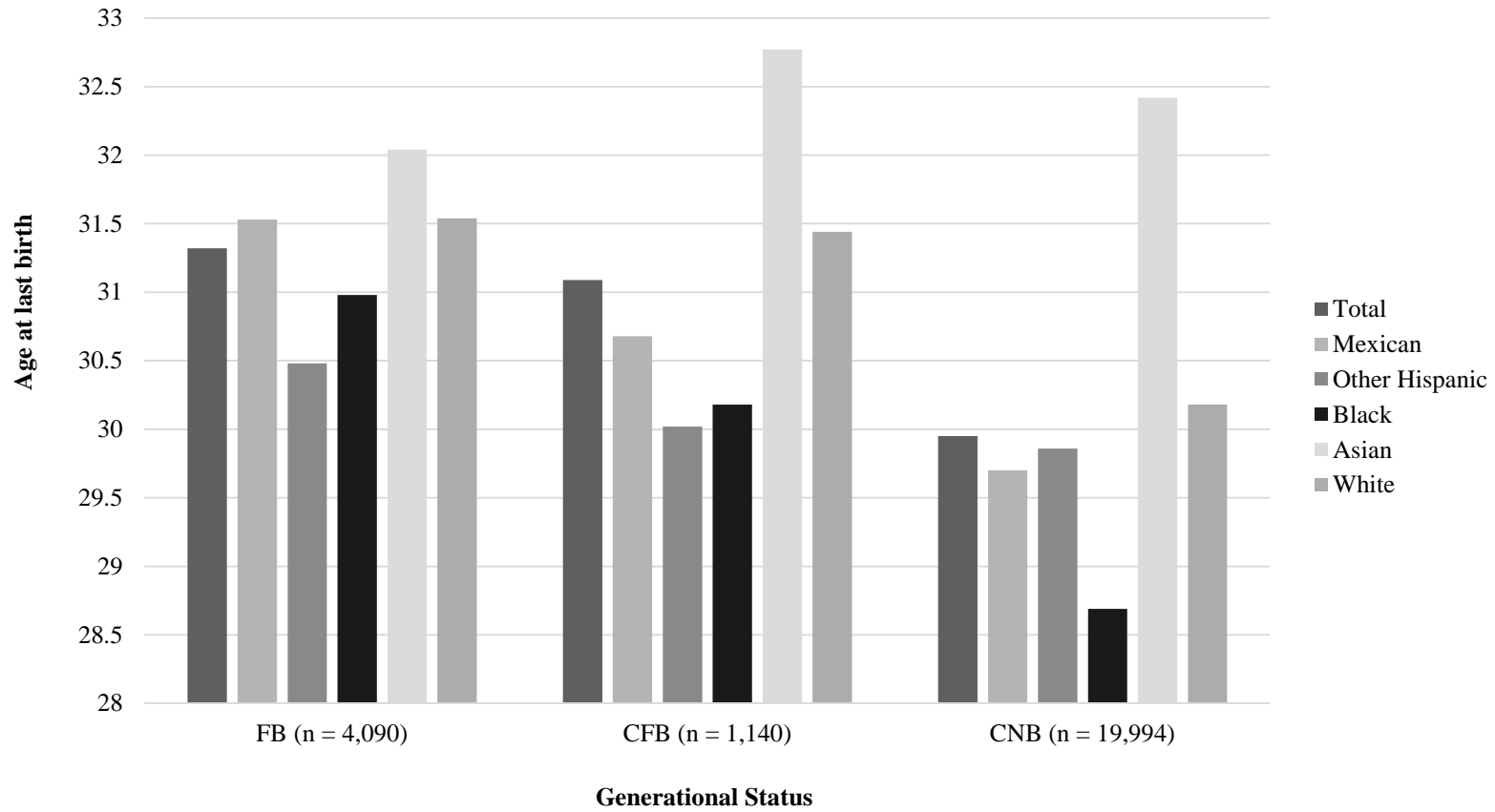
Note: FB: Foreign-born CFB: Children of the foreign-born CNB: Children of the native-born

**Figure 2.**  
**Weighted Percent with Any Children by Race-Ethnicity and**  
**Nativity-Generation, ages 18-24 (N = 34,620)**



Note: FB, LA: Foreign-born, late arrival ( $\geq 12$ ) FB, EA: Foreign-born, early arrival ( $< 12$ )  
 CFB: Children of the foreign-born CNB: Children of the native-born

**Figure 3.**  
**Weighted Mean Age at Most Recent Birth by Race-Ethnicity**  
**and Nativity-Generation, ages 40–44 (N=25,224)**



Note: FB: Foreign-born CFB: Children of the foreign-born CNB: Children of the native-born