

# FILIPINO IMMIGRANTS IN HAWAII: A PROFILE OF RECENT ARRIVALS

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East-West Population Institute  
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and  
Operation Manong  
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Manoa

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## INTRODUCTION

Most of the early Asian immigrants to the Hawaiian Islands were brought to work on the sugar plantations. These immigrant plantation workers were primarily from three groups: the Chinese, who were dominant in the 1880s; the Japanese, who came in large numbers during the 1890s; and the Filipinos, who have been in the majority since the 1920s. Filipino immigrants still comprise a substantial proportion of the people migrating to Hawaii from other countries, although few of the new immigrants are plantation workers.

This report describes some essential facts about recent immigrants from the Philippines, especially

those who have come since the major changes in U.S. immigration laws in 1965. These facts should help private and state agencies and other members of the community to understand the social and economic status of recent Filipino immigrants. The information presented in this report is taken from existing publications and a recent survey of Filipino immigrants. Included at the end of the report are a list of selected immigrant service agencies and a list of suggested readings for those interested in more detailed information.

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## FILIPINOS IN THE UNITED STATES

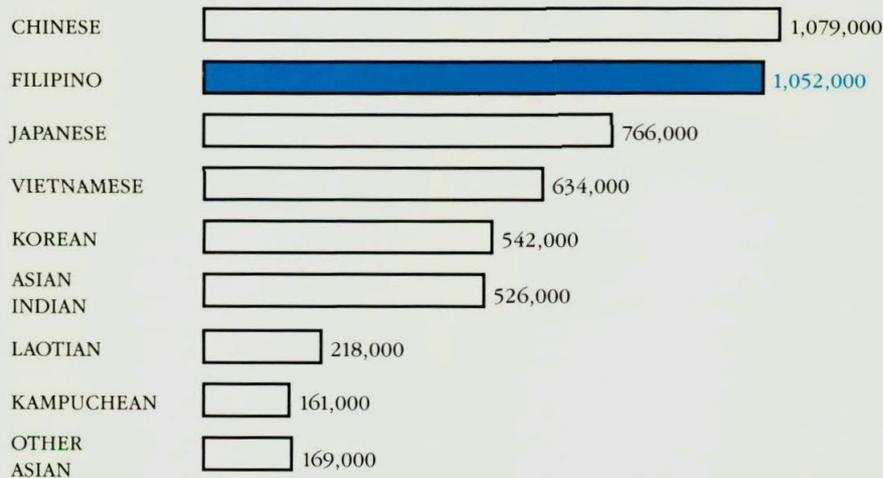
Filipinos are currently the second largest group of Asians in the United States and are likely to become the dominant group by 1986, edging out the Chinese. About one out of five Asian-Americans is Filipino.

Numbering just over one million today, the Filipino-American population is expected to be over two million in the year 2000 and four

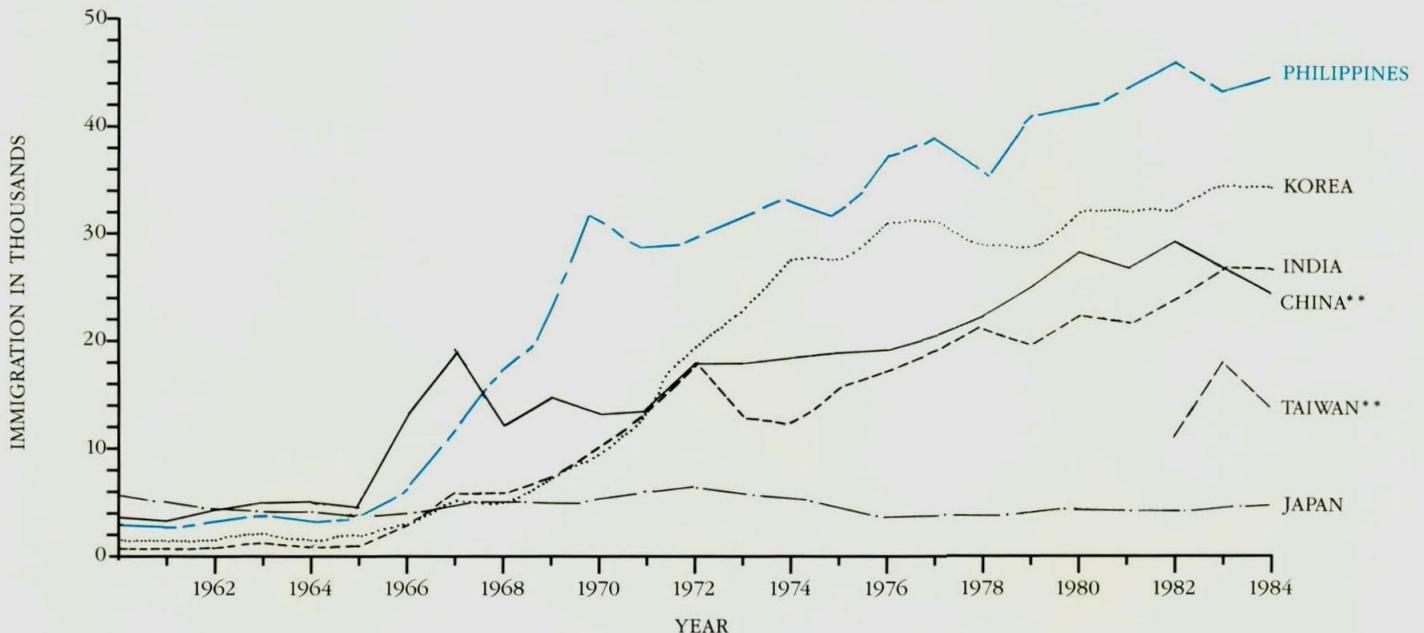
million by 2030.

Filipinos are also the largest group among current Asian immigrants to the United States, numbering over 40,000 admissions per year. This puts Filipinos in second place (after Mexicans) among immigrants coming to the U.S. from all the countries in the world.

**Fig. 1. ESTIMATES OF THE ASIAN-AMERICAN POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES, 1985**



**Figure 2  
U.S. IMMIGRATION FROM SELECTED ASIAN COUNTRIES\*  
1960-84**



\*Refugees are not included. The major Asian refugee group is Vietnamese, of whom about 450,000 were admitted between 1975 and 1984.

\*\*Before 1982, China and Taiwan are combined. A separate immigration quota of 20,000 persons for Taiwan became effective in 1982.

## FILIPINOS IN HAWAII

Filipinos are the third largest ethnic group in Hawaii, comprising about 14% of the total population. Thus, nearly every seventh resident of Hawaii is Filipino.

More than half of the Filipinos in Hawaii were born in the Philippines. Most (70-80%) are natives of the Ilocos region, a relatively poor agricultural area in the northwest corner of the Philippines' main island of Luzon. Ilokanos have been migratory for centuries and are found in many parts of the Philippines as well as overseas.

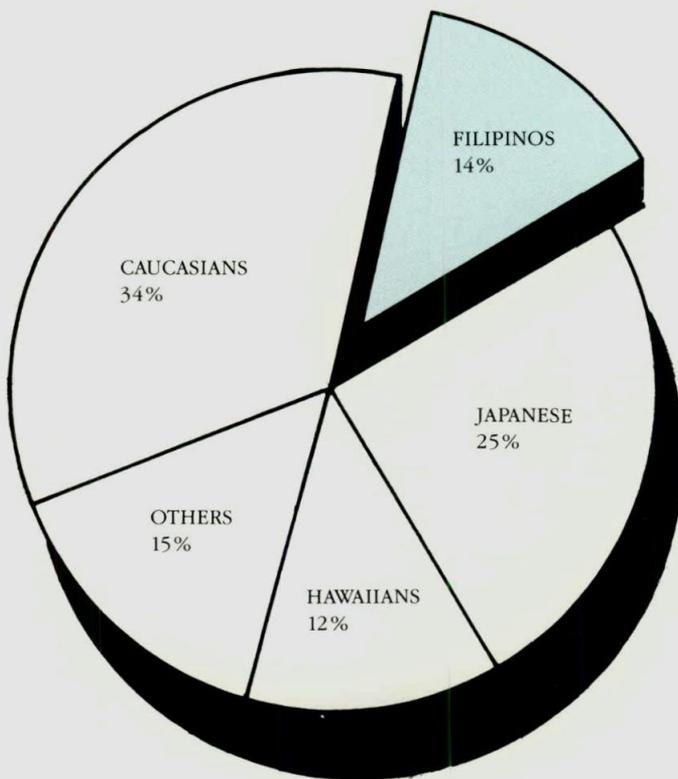
The impact of Filipino immigration on Hawaii is substantial. Among all immigrants coming to Hawaii, the proportion who are Filipino has ranged from 40% to 65% since the 1965 change in U.S. immigration laws. At the present time,

Filipinos are the majority among U.S. immigrants who choose Hawaii as their new home. Each year, about 5,000 Filipinos migrate to Hawaii.

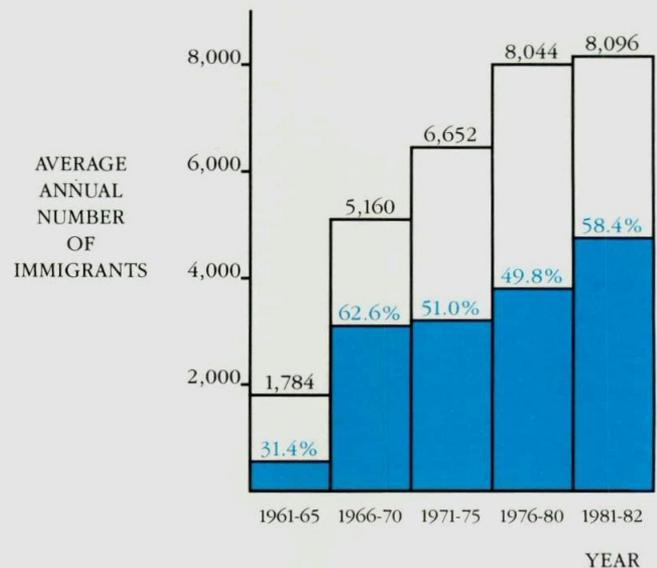
About three-fourths of all Filipinos in Hawaii live on Oahu. The rest are almost evenly distributed among the counties of Maui (10%), Hawaii (10%), and Kauai (8%).

Within each county Filipinos are concentrated in certain residential areas. For example, almost half of all Filipinos on Oahu in 1975 lived in just four districts: Kalihi-Palama and Upper Kalihi in central Honolulu, and Waipahu and Ewa-Makakilo in the outskirts of the city. Such concentrations are due to economic factors as well as to the closeness of ethnic and kinship ties among Hawaii Filipinos.

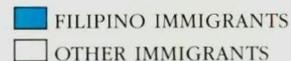
**Fig. 3. ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION IN THE STATE OF HAWAII, 1980**



**Fig. 4. FILIPINOS AS A PROPORTION OF ALL IMMIGRANTS REPORTING HAWAII AS THEIR STATE OF INTENDED RESIDENCE, 1961-1982**



Legend:



## SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF HAWAII FILIPINOS

Hawaii Filipinos are generally of lower socioeconomic status than either mainland Filipinos or non-Filipinos in Hawaii.

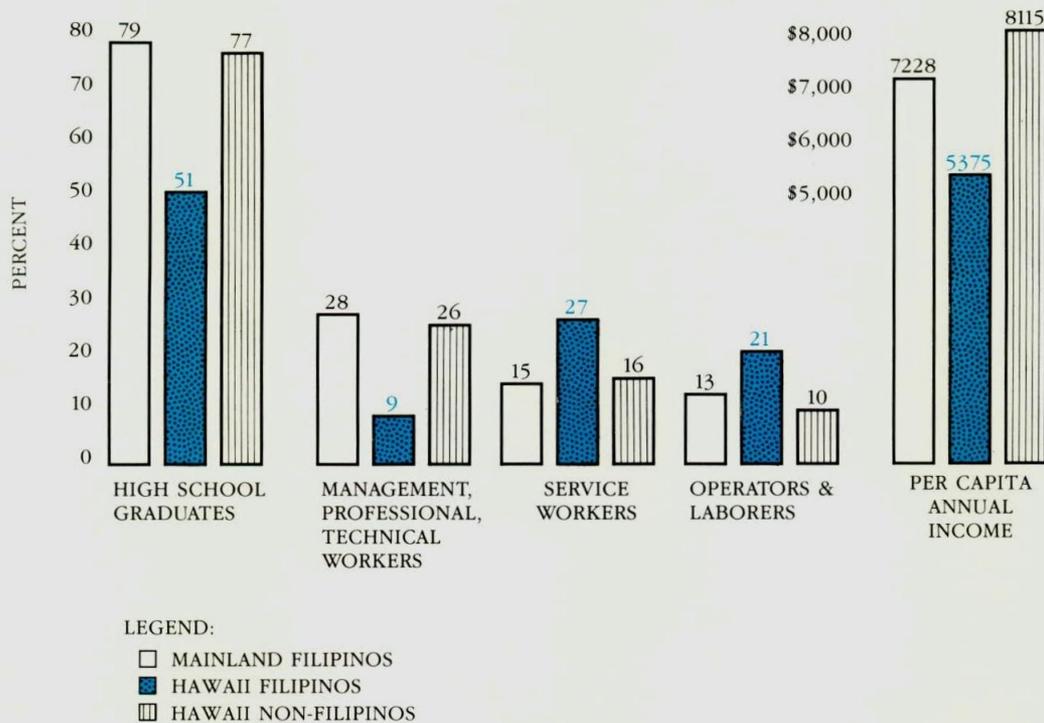
For example, just over half of Hawaii Filipinos are high school graduates, compared to 79% of mainland Filipinos and 77% of non-Filipinos in Hawaii.

Similar patterns are evident for occupations. Less than ten percent of Hawaii Filipinos have professional, technical, or other white collar jobs,

compared to more than one-fourth of mainland Filipinos and of non-Filipinos in Hawaii.

At the lower end of the occupational scale, a higher percentage of Hawaii Filipinos are service workers, equipment operators, and laborers (48%) than are mainland Filipinos (28%) or non-Filipinos in Hawaii (26%). As might be expected, the average personal income for Hawaii Filipinos is substantially lower than for their compatriots on the mainland or their co-residents in Hawaii.

**Fig. 5**  
**EDUCATION, OCCUPATION, AND INCOME:**  
**COMPARISON OF MAINLAND FILIPINOS,**  
**HAWAII FILIPINOS, AND HAWAII**  
**NON-FILIPINOS, 1980**



## THE ILOKANO COMMUNITY ON OAHU

A detailed survey of almost 1,500 Ilokanos was conducted on Oahu in 1981, giving new insights about this important segment of Hawaii's population. The survey focused on adults who immigrated since 1965.

According to this survey, the typical adult male Ilokano immigrant on Oahu is 41 years old, is likely to be married, and has more than three children on average. There is a 30% chance that he attended college, and a 50% chance that he graduated from high school. He is likely to have worked before immigration and almost certainly is working now in Hawaii, probably in a service occupation or as a construction worker. He is likely to hold only one job and earns \$222 per week.

Immigrant Ilokano women in Hawaii are a little younger, are equally well educated, generally did not work in the Ilocos but are working now, and are more likely to be in white-collar jobs in Hawaii than men. The most common occupation

for Ilokano women, however, is as a hotel maid or housekeeper—over one-fourth are employed in these jobs. The average weekly wage for Ilokano women in Hawaii is \$121.

Ilokano households are larger and have more working adults than most households in Hawaii. For these two reasons, the average household is doing reasonably well economically. Fifty percent of the Ilokano immigrant households had an income of at least \$20,000 per year. The comparable proportion for all households on Oahu was 53%. A more precise calculation, the median household income, shows a figure of \$22,000 for Ilokano households. This is slightly higher than a roughly comparable calculation of median income for all households in the State of Hawaii.

Over one-third of Ilokano immigrant households own their own home. The figure is much higher in Waipahu (60% ownership) than in lower Kalihi (33%) or upper Kalihi (23%).

**Table 1. The "Typical" Recent Ilokano Immigrant on Oahu**

	Men	Women
Average age	41 years	40 years
Married	86%	89%
Average number of children <sup>a</sup>	3.6	3.1
Average years of education	8.6	8.5
High school graduate	49%	47%
Some college	30%	34%
Worked before immigration	71%	33%
Currently working in Hawaii	91%	72%
Professional/technical/administrative/ sales job (white collar)	9%	21%
More than one current job	13%	6%
Non-employed housewives	—	23%
Retired	2%	0%
Unemployed, looking for work	3%	3%
Average weekly income <sup>b</sup>	\$222	\$121

<sup>a</sup>calculated for married persons only

<sup>b</sup>calculated for employed persons only

**Table 2. Ten Most Common Jobs in 1981 for Ilokano Men who Immigrated to Oahu since 1965**

Dishwashers, waiters, busboys, food service workers	17%
Maintenance and utility workers, janitors and cleaners	16%
Carpenters and other craftsmen	12%
Construction workers	12%
Landscaping and yard workers	6%
Pineapple pickers and field hands	5%
Sugar and other agricultural workers	5%
Housemen for hotels	5%
Laborers	5%
Pineapple cannery workers	1%

**Table 3. Ten Most Common Jobs in 1981 for Ilokano Women who Immigrated to Oahu since 1965**

Hotel maids and housekeepers	26%
Seamstresses and other textile workers	11%
Keypunchers, bookkeepers, clerical workers	10%
Trimmers and packers for tuna, pineapple and other food products	9%
Pantry workers, counter workers, food service workers	7%
Nurse's aides, LPNs, health care workers	6%
Cashiers and sales clerks	6%
Janitors and cleaners	5%
Pineapple pickers and field hands	4%
Ironers and other laundry workers	4%

**Table 4. Ilokano Households on Oahu**

Mean number of persons per household	4.9
Mean number of income earners per household	2.4
Median household annual income	\$22,000
Percent home ownership	37%
Home ownership — Upper Kalihi	23%
Home ownership — Lower Kalihi	33%
Home ownership — Waipahu	60%

## WHY ILOKANOS COME TO HAWAII

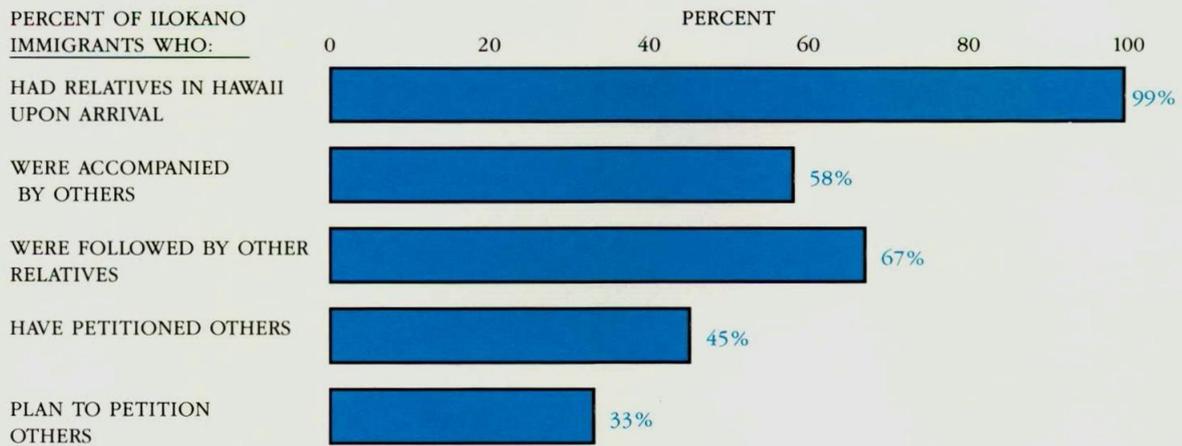
Motivations for migration are often classified as “push” and “pull” factors. Historically, the push factors for Ilokanos have been very important because the Ilocos region is a poor, densely settled area with inadequate farmland and few jobs outside of farming. Many recent migrants, however, come from relatively well-off families in the Ilocos for whom pull factors seem to be at least equally important. They are motivated to migrate by two key attractions: family connections in Hawaii and the prospect of further economic advancement for themselves and their children.

Family connections are essential, since virtually all Ilokanos gain admission to the United States as a result of being petitioned by a close family member under the “family reunification”

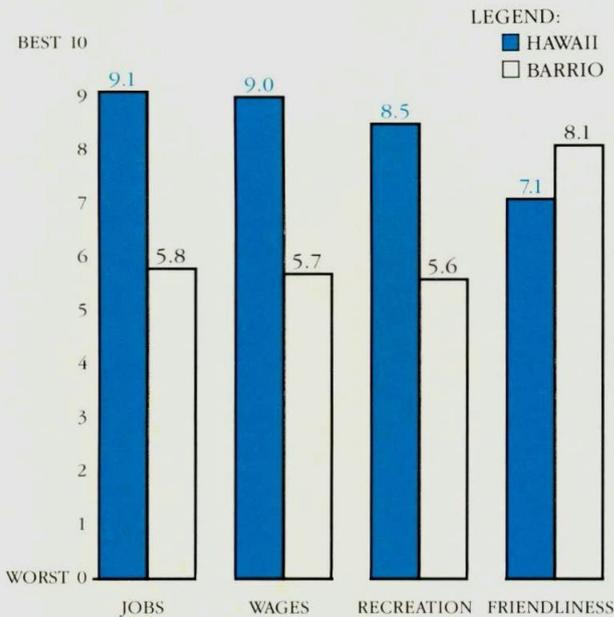
provisions of the immigration law. The family also plays a critical role in helping new immigrants get settled. Among recent Ilokano immigrants, 96% stayed with relatives upon arrival. Most also had help from relatives or close friends in finding their first job.

Immigration through family connections is a form of “chain migration,” where a move by one person leads to future moves by others. Virtually all Ilokano immigrants had relatives living in Hawaii at the time of their arrival, and they were usually accompanied by one or more family members when they migrated. Two-thirds had already been followed by others in the family, and many had either filed petitions for others or planned to do so.

**FIG. 6. CHAIN MIGRATION**



**FIG. 7. RATINGS OF HAWAII AND HOME BARRIO**



Ilokanos see clear differences between their home barrios and Hawaii as a place to live. The home barrio rates higher on “friendliness of the people,” while Hawaii rates much higher on jobs, wages, and recreation. Hawaii is also seen as a place with better educational opportunities, which is an important motivational factor for many immigrant families.

When asked the main reason they were planning to move to Hawaii, about half of a group of Ilokanos surveyed in the Ilocos gave economic reasons—jobs, income, better opportunities. Most of the others said their main reason was to join family members.

## ILOKANO ADJUSTMENT IN HAWAII

Ilokanos coming to Hawaii experience major changes in their lives. One important aspect is a change in jobs.

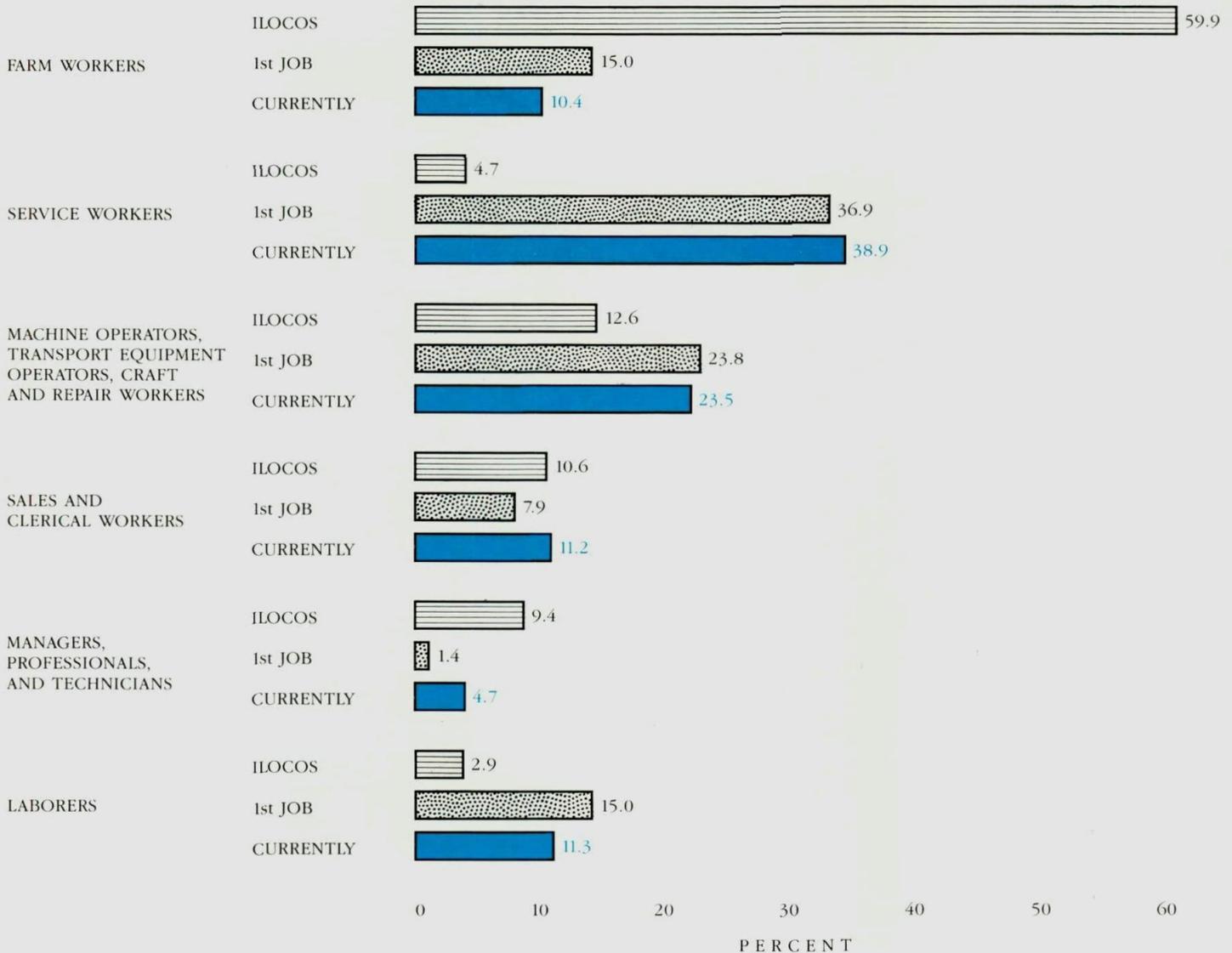
Before coming to Oahu, most Ilokanos (60%) were farmers. Only 15% went into farming as their first job in Hawaii and only 10% were farmers at the time of the survey. (These figures would be higher on other islands or if pre-1965 immigrants were included.)

The most common first job for Ilokanos on Oahu is as a service worker, most likely in a hotel or restaurant. Many remain in service

occupations, gaining through seniority better-paying and more stable positions. Others shift to jobs with substantially higher wages, especially in the construction industry.

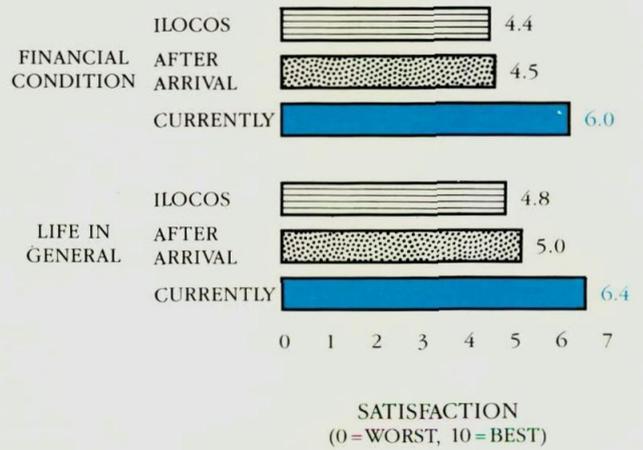
Only a small proportion of Ilokanos—about 10%—ever hold white collar sales or clerical jobs. Some who were professionals in the Ilocos, such as nurses and teachers, are unable to continue in those fields in Hawaii. The proportion of professionals and managers was 9% in the Ilocos, 1% in Hawaii just after migration, and 5% later on.

**FIG. 8. OCCUPATIONS OF RECENT ILOKANO IMMIGRANTS ON OAHU: BEFORE IMMIGRATION, AFTER ARRIVAL, AND AT TIME OF INTERVIEW IN 1981**



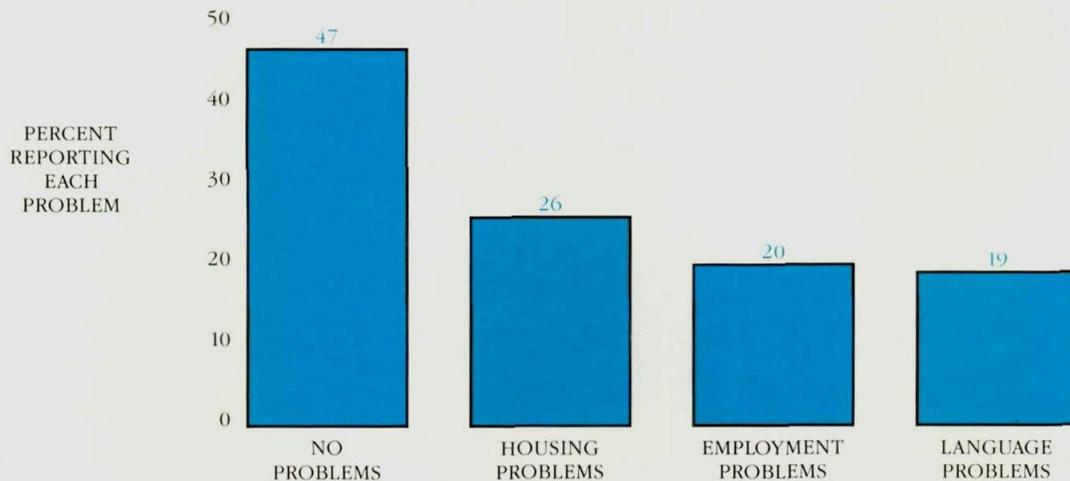
Adjustment can also be determined by asking people how satisfied they are. Using a scale of 0 to 10 (worst to best), Ilokanos in Hawaii rated their life in the Ilocos before the move at 4.8, just after arrival in Hawaii at 5.0, and later on at 6.4. Similar ratings were given for their financial condition. Thus, Ilokano immigrants become more satisfied with their situation as time goes on.

**FIG. 9**  
**RATINGS OF SATISFACTION BY RECENT ILOKANO IMMIGRANTS ON OAHU: BEFORE IMMIGRATION, AFTER ARRIVAL, AND AT TIME OF INTERVIEW IN 1981**



While Ilokanos are generally happy with their life in Hawaii, just over half also reported some specific problems of adjustment. Problems with housing were most common (26%), followed closely by employment (20%) and language problems (19%). Discrimination is also a problem that Ilokanos encounter; 42% felt that Filipinos are discriminated against in Hawaii.

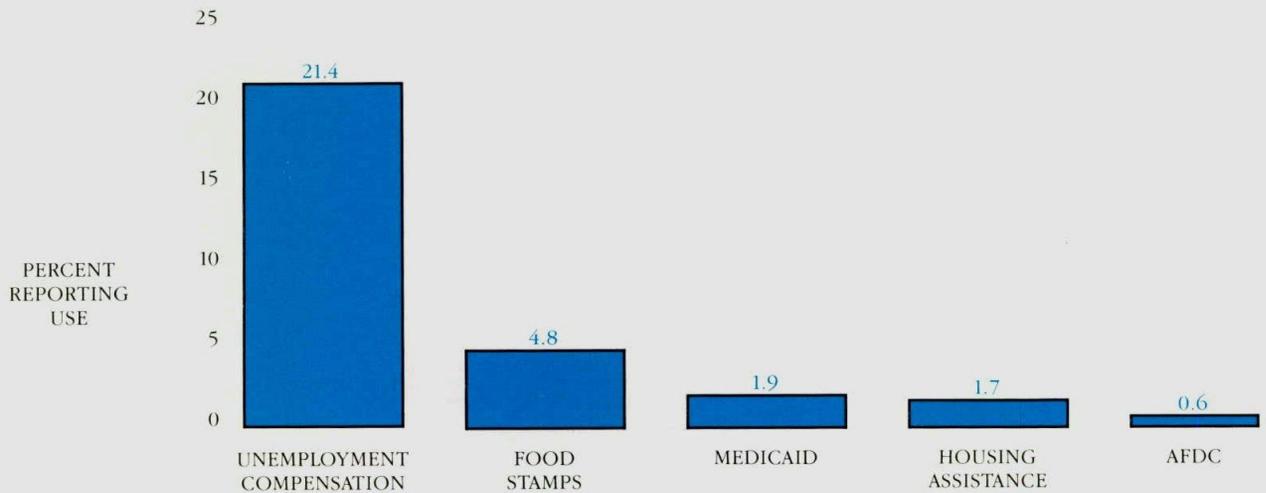
**FIG. 10.**  
**PROBLEMS REPORTED BY RECENT ILOKANO IMMIGRANTS IN THREE ASPECTS OF ADJUSTMENT**



Because most Ilokanos have family in Hawaii and tend to rely on the family in times of need, their use of government welfare and social services programs is less than for some other groups. Since their arrival in Hawaii, 21% of Ilokanos had used unemployment compensation, reflecting the unstable nature of jobs in the tourism and construction industries. Only 5% had ever used food stamps and fewer than 2% had received Medicaid, housing assistance, or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

A majority of recent Ilokano immigrants said that they expected to stay in Hawaii; only 10% expected ever to return to the Philippines to live. Three out of four had already become U.S. citizens or planned to do so. Among those with citizenship, 81% were registered to vote and 95% of those registered said they had voted in the last election. Thus, recent Ilokano immigrants are both committed to their new home and involved in community affairs.

**FIG. 11.**  
**REPORTED USE OF GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**  
**BY RECENT ILOKANO IMMIGRANTS: PERCENTAGE EVER**  
**USED SPECIFIED PROGRAMS SINCE ARRIVAL**



**COMMENTS**

Filipinos will soon comprise the largest Asian-American ethnic group in the United States and they will continue to be a substantial proportion of Hawaii's population. It is important that government and community agencies begin to identify and meet the needs of the Filipino community. Given the opportunity, Filipinos will continue to contribute their talents and cultural heritage to Hawaii's multi-ethnic society.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

### General Assistance

Catholic Immigration Center  
712 N. School St.  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 533-4570

Kalihi-Palama Immigrant Service Center  
720 N. King St.  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 845-3918

Susannah Wesley Community Center  
1117 Kaili St.  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 848-0377

Filipino Counseling  
Kalihi-Palama Mental Health Clinic  
712 N. School St.  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 533-7263

Kalihi-Palama Health Clinic  
766 N. King St.  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 848-1438

Kokua Kalihi Valley  
1888 Owawa St.  
Honolulu 96819  
Telephone: 841-3275

### Education

Operation Manong  
University of Hawaii  
East-West Rd. 4-D  
Honolulu 96822  
Telephone: 948-7348

### Translation/Interpretation

(24-hour emergencies)  
Bilingual Access Line  
200 N. Vineyard Blvd. #603  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 521-4566

### Legal

Na Loio No Na Kanaka  
810 N. Vineyard Blvd.  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 847-8828

### Research and Information

Philippine Studies Program  
Moore Hall 210  
University of Hawaii  
Honolulu 96822  
Telephone: 948-6393

### Health and Counseling

Bayanihan Health Services  
712 N. School St.  
Honolulu 96817  
Telephone: 537-2307

Office of Community Services  
335 Merchant St. Rm. 101  
Honolulu 96813  
Telephone: 548-2130, 2014

## SUGGESTED READINGS

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## SOURCE NOTES

Figure 1. Estimates based on 1980 census figures, U.S. government data on 1980-85 immigrants and refugees, and estimates of 1980-85 births and deaths.

Figures 2 and 4. Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service Annual Reports, Statistical Yearbooks, and unpublished records.

Figure 3. Data based on U.S. Census of Population, 1980. Estimates of the state population on July 1, 1983 by the Hawaii State Department of Health showed only 11.3 percent Filipino (State of Hawaii Data Book, 1984, Table 24). However, this did not include Filipinos of mixed race, which the state tabulates under "Mixed." For individuals of mixed race the Census assigns a category on the basis of self identification or the race of the mother.

Figure 5. Figures for high school graduates refer to all individuals aged 25 and over. Figures for occupation refer to all employed individuals aged 16 and over. Source: Published and unpublished 1980 census data.

Table 1 and all following tables and figures:

Data on Ilokanos are derived from a 1981 survey of 1,484 adults living on Oahu who arrived in Hawaii after 1964 and were born in the Ilocos region (the provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, and La Union). Eligible survey respondents had to be at least 16 years old at the time of arrival in Hawaii and age 18-65 at the time of the interview. Eligible households from which respondents were chosen were located through a door-to-door screening procedure in sample "blocks" that were chosen randomly from all "blocks" on Oahu where the proportion of households with at least one Filipino resident was estimated to be .15 or greater. The 1,484 respondents resided in 853 households. The sample households were located mainly in Kalihi (67 percent) and Waipahu (14 percent).

Twelve percent were located in other urban areas and 7 percent in other rural areas.

Table 1. The average weekly income is calculated from the wages for the first and second current jobs. The difference between men and women is partly attributable to the higher percentage of men holding more than one job.

Figure 7. Respondents were asked to rank, on a scale of 0 (worst) to 10 (best), the availability of jobs, wages, recreational facilities, and friendliness of the people in Hawaii and in their home barrios. Figures given are the average of all responses to each question.

Figure 8. Note that for Ilocos occupation and first Oahu occupation, the dates to which the data refer were different for each individual.

Figure 9. Respondents were asked to rank, on a ladder scale of 0 (worst) to 10 (best), how satisfied they were with their financial condition and with life in general at three points in time: before they left the Ilocos, just after arrival in Hawaii, and at the time of the survey in 1981.

Figure 10. Respondents were asked whether they had experienced any problems in housing, jobs, schooling, or language since coming to Hawaii. The figures show the percentage saying "yes" for the three areas where substantial problems were reported. (Problems with schooling were reported by 3% but it is not clear whether this refers to problems of the person being interviewed or problems for his or her children.) The percentage shown as "no problems" said "no" to each of the four areas and said "no" to a probe, "Have you had any other problems?"

Figure 11. Respondents were asked whether they had ever used any of the five government programs since their arrival in Hawaii. The figures show the percentage saying "yes" for each program.

