

US Latinos: Demographic Shifts and Implications
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As most Americans know, the Latino population has increased dramatically in the United States in recent years.¹ Yet, rapid Latino growth is just one of the many demographic changes occurring for this population. The Latino presence in the United States is a very dynamic one, which reflects the unique and varied economic and political relationships between Latin America and the United States. As such, the Latino population in the United States is diverse in terms of national origin, nativity, and context of arrival. The Latino population in the United States is marked by at least four important characteristics: explosive Latino growth, increasing geographic dispersion, concentration in metropolitan areas but a recent move to non-metropolitan areas, and a large foreign-born population from Latin America. Each trend has important consequences for the nation, Latinos themselves, and the communities in which they reside. Consequently, this article provides an overview of important changes occurring in this population over time, and a brief discussion of the implications of these important shifts for Latinos and non-Latinos living in the United States.

This overview primarily comes from decennial census data, one of the most influential data sources about the Latina/o population in the United States. The U.S. constitution calls for a counting of the U.S. population every ten years for the purposes of political apportionment; of which the most recent collection was Census 2000. Census 2000 collected a broad range of data about the US population, including the race and

¹ This piece employs the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) definition of Hispanic, "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture regardless of race" (OMB 1997). The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably here.

Hispanic origin of those living in the United States.² More recent data about Latinos cited in this paper comes from another Census Bureau source, the American Community Survey, which provides census-type information more frequently than every ten years.

The phenomenon that receives the most attention is the rapid and continued growth of Latinos. According to the US Census Bureau, there were approximately 14.6 million Latinos in the United States in 1980, 22.3 million in 1990, and 35.3 million in 2000. These figures show that the Latino population increased by 53.0 percent between 1980 and 1990, and 57.9 percent between 1990 and 2000. This increase is astounding, given that the US population increased as a whole by approximately 12.5 percent during the 1990's. Indeed, Latinos accounted for approximately 65.5 percent of the *entire* net increase in the U.S. population between 1990 and 2000. Consequently, the proportion of the U.S. population that is Latino increased from 6.5 percent in 1980 to approximately 12.6 percent in 2000.

Recent Hispanic population estimates suggest that the trend continues: as of July 1, 2004 the Latino population was estimated at 41.3 million, 17.0% higher than just four years earlier. The high fertility rates of Latinas and international immigration from Latin America are two important components of Latino population increases. For example, nationally, Latinos were 12.5 percent of the total population in 2000 (Guzmán 2002), but nearly 20.0 percent of all live births were to Latina mothers in 2000 (Martin *et al.*, 2001, Table 4).

² In 1997, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) revised earlier standards to collect racial and ethnic information that better "reflects the increasing diversity of our Nation's population stemming from growth in interracial marriages and immigration" (OMB 2000: 6). The 1997 revisions to the federal standards indicate that respondents can select one or more of five revised racial categories (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White). The federal government categorizes Latinos as an ethnic group that can be of any race.

The proportion of Latinos that claimed Mexican, Puerto Rican or Cuban origin grew by 52.9 percent, 24.9 percent and 18.9 percent, respectively, over the ten year period. Approximately 15.3 percent of all Latinos reported that they were some “other” Hispanic origin and not Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban, an increase of approximately 96.9 percent between 1990 and 2000. These Latinos did not mark whether they were Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or another national group but rather identified as “other” and did not write in a group, or wrote in general terms such as “Hispanic” or “Latino.”

Beyond rapid growth, there are many other important changes occurring within this dynamic population, such as the increasing geographic dispersion of this group. Historically, Latinos have been concentrated in a few states, most notably California, Texas, New York, Florida and Illinois. This was especially true in 1980 and 1990, when 73.9 percent and 74.7 percent, respectively, of all Latinos lived in those five states. Not surprisingly, the geographic concentration continued in 2000. For instance, while nationally, Latinos accounted for 39.6 percent of the total U.S. increase during the 1990’s, in California Latinos accounted for 79.7 percent of the total population change. However, the continued residential concentration of Latinos was also coupled with important geographic shifts in the distribution of Latinos between 1990 and 2000. Indeed, the proportion of Latinos who lived in California, Florida, Illinois, New York and Texas dropped to 69.5 percent in 2000, a decrease of 5 percentage points since 1990.

Further, while Census 2000 confirmed that the Hispanic population grew by at least 39.9 percent in every region of the United States, the largest percent change by region was in the American Midwest, 81.0 percent. Except for Cubans in Florida, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Texas and Illinois, other Midwestern states have

not traditionally had large Latino populations. Given this history, the dramatic increases, in percent if not in absolute size, in both regions is of note. Indeed, the Latino population more than doubled in states such as Minnesota (166.1 percent) and tripled in states such as Georgia (299.6 percent) and North Carolina (393.9 percent) between 1990 and 2000. Thus, Census 2000 data not only documents rapid changes in the Hispanic population nationally but also indicates that there are growing proportions of Latinos living in all areas of the United States, but especially outside of the traditional Midwestern and Southern states of Illinois, Florida, and Texas.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Latino population growth in the region accounted for the majority of total Midwestern population growth. In the decade before 2000, the number of Latinos more than doubled in states such as Indiana (increase of 117 percent), Iowa (153 percent), and Wisconsin (107 percent) during the decade (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). Illinois typically accounts for the majority of Latino increase in the region, yet in 2000 only 44.8 percent, or approximately 626,000 individuals, of the growth took place in that state. The remaining 55.2 percent occurred in other states such as Indiana, Michigan, and Minnesota (8.3 percent, 8.7 percent, and 6.4 percent, respectively). By July 1, 2004, approximately 3.7 million Latinos lived in the Midwest, 18.6 percent higher than four years previously.

Though much of the growth of Latinos in the Midwest appears to be new, there is a relatively long history of Mexican immigrants, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans in the region. For example, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans first arrived before World War I. Since the very beginning, they have been visible contributors to the

economic development of the American Midwest, in agricultural jobs, as well as employment in industrial and manufacturing firms such as Ford Motor Company, Inland Steel, and other factories in Indiana and Ohio (García 1996; Vargas 1993). Of course, Latinos have made an important impact in non-economic aspects of the Midwest, as well; especially in the era leading up to the Great Depression. For instance, Midwestern Latinos operated ethnic restaurants, markets, boarding houses, and barbershops; raised money to build Catholic Churches; established mutual aid societies and civic organizations and celebrated Mexican and Puerto Rican holidays (García 1996; Vargas 1993; Pérez 2004).

The second largest regional percent change was in the American South, with 71.2 percent growth between 1990 and 2000. As has been true historically, Texas and Florida, accounted for approximately 71.3 percent of the total increase in Latinos in the South. The remaining 28.7 percent of the Latino population increase, or approximately 1.4 million individuals, occurred in other Southern states during the 1990's. Latino population growth in the South other than Texas and Florida is enormous. Indeed, one comparison that puts this important demographic change in perspective is that the Latino change in other Southern states between 1990 and 2000 was nearly the size of the entire Latino population of Illinois in 2000. Especially high percent growth occurred in states such as Georgia (299.6 percent) and North Carolina (393.3 percent). The recent influx of Latinos to the Midwest and South are related to earlier periods of Latino migration and settlement in the region; as well as increasing employment opportunities in meatpacking in the Midwest, poultry and seafood processing and textile manufacturing in the South

and employer preferences for Latino immigrant labor (Stull et al., 1995; Hernández-León, and Zúñiga 2000, Millard and Chapa 2004).

A third demographic change of Latinos also involves the changing geographic distributions of Latinos from traditional to non-traditional states. Latinos have historically been urban dwellers. Indeed, in 1990, more than 90 percent of the nation's Hispanics lived in metropolitan areas (Fuguitt 1995). However, there has also been significant Latino growth in non-metropolitan areas in recent years. Indeed, by 2000, the growth rate of Latinos was larger in nonmetropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas (Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Latino population growth has been an important component of nonmetropolitan population change, accounting for 25 percent of the total nonmetropolitan population growth during the 1990's (Kandel and Cromartie 2004).

As in other areas of the United States, Latinos in the Midwest continue to be urban dwellers, with large populations living in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Gary, and Milwaukee. However, rapid Latino growth occurred in rural Midwestern areas during the 1990s: the Latino population in the non-metropolitan Midwest grew by 112.8 percent, or 217,068 individuals, between 1990 and 2000 (Goudy 2002). In non-metropolitan counties in Illinois, for example, such as Cass County in central Illinois, experienced 1975.0 percent growth over the decade, to comprise 8.5 percent of the population, approximately 1,162 by 2000. While these numbers may seem small, the impact on small communities can be tremendous. Again, much of this rural growth stems from the meatpacking industry's "rural industrialization strategy," the relocation of urban plants to rural counties (Broadway 1995). Undoubtedly, factors such as growing employment

opportunities, a relatively affordable standard of living, and existing social networks help explain this phenomenon. Consequently, many areas of the rural United States have more ethnic and racial diversity than ever before.

Finally, data collected by the US Census Bureau document that while the majority of Latinos in the US are native-born, approximately 40 percent of Latinos are immigrants.⁵ The majority of immigrants in the US are from Latin America, primarily Mexico, with others having come from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Guatemala.⁷ The increasing growth of Latinos who are not Mexican, Puerto Rican, and/or Cuban origin means that the Latino population is more heterogeneous than in the past.

Each of these demographic changes comes with important implications for Latinos and non-Latinos. For example, Latinos are a young population with very high percentages of participation in the paid work force. Indeed, approximately 79.8 percent of Latino men are employed, the highest rate of any racial/ethnic group. However, Latinos tend to be concentrated in lower-paid occupations with few benefits. Consequently, Latinos have lower average incomes, homeownership rates that are nearly 30 percent lower than Non-Hispanic Whites (Callis and Cavanaugh 2004), and have the lowest rates of health insurance of any group (Pew Hispanic Center 2002).

The Census Bureau estimates that nearly one-quarter of the US population will be Latino by 2050 (US Census Bureau 2004). Given the current and expected size of Latinos, the characteristics and demographic trends involving this group have

⁵ Census 2000 shows that 40.2 percent of Latinos were immigrants in 2000, American Community Survey data show that 39.2 percent were immigrants in 2004.

⁷ Puerto Ricans are US citizens, so they are not categorized as immigrants.

implications for the ability of the US workforce to support the elderly, the upward mobility of Latinos, Latino health and life expectancy rates. The movement of Latinos to non-traditional areas of the United States, such as the rural Midwest and South, can lead to challenges in medical care, schooling, housing, and social services (Millard and Chapa 2004). Finally, Census Bureau estimates suggest that by 2050, only 20 percent of the Latino population will be foreign born (US Census Bureau 2000). Clearly, the fortunes of this heterogeneous and dynamic population and those of non-Latinos are closely entwined.

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