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BY **ROGELIO SAENZ**

## LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES 2010

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**ROGELIO SAENZ** is professor in the department of sociology at Texas A&M University. He is also a Fellow of the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire and writes occasionally on demographic trends for the Population Reference Bureau. He has written extensively on topics related to demography, immigration, Latinos, and inequality. Saenz is a co-editor of *Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of America*.

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# LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES 2010

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The Latino population's young age structure largely explains their rapid growth. In 2009, the median age of Latinos was 27, compared with 41 among whites.

63%

While Latinos are often viewed as immigrants, the majority was born in the United States.

BY  
2050,

Latinos could represent three of every 10 persons in the United States.

Latinos have the lowest levels of education across racial and ethnic groups. Investments need to be made to ensure that Latino youth are prepared to contribute to a technological and global economy.

**Latinos are increasingly shaping the demographic makeup of the United States.** While the U.S. population grew by 36 percent between 1980 and 2009, the Latino population more than tripled, increasing from 14.6 million to nearly 48.4 million.<sup>1</sup> Latinos accounted for slightly more than 40 percent of the roughly 81 million people added to the U.S. population over the past 30 years. The influence of the Latino population will only grow in coming decades, and mostly through natural increase, not immigration.

## The Dynamics of Latino Population Growth

The U.S. population grew by about 9 percent between 2000 and 2009, rising from 281 million to 307 million. The Latino population increased by 37 percent—four times more rapidly than the United States overall—and accounted for slightly more than half of the nearly 26 million people added to the U.S. population during this past decade. Today, Latinos make up almost one-sixth of the U.S. population.

What accounts for the rapid growth of the Latino population? A variety of demographic factors, including high levels of immigration and a combination of high fertility alongside low mortality, partly explain the brisk growth. But the major underlying factor is the young age structure of the Latino population along with a rapidly aging white population. In 2009 the median age of Latinos was 27, compared with 41 among whites.

Figure 1 (page 2) demonstrates the youthfulness of the Latino population and the aging of the white population. There are five

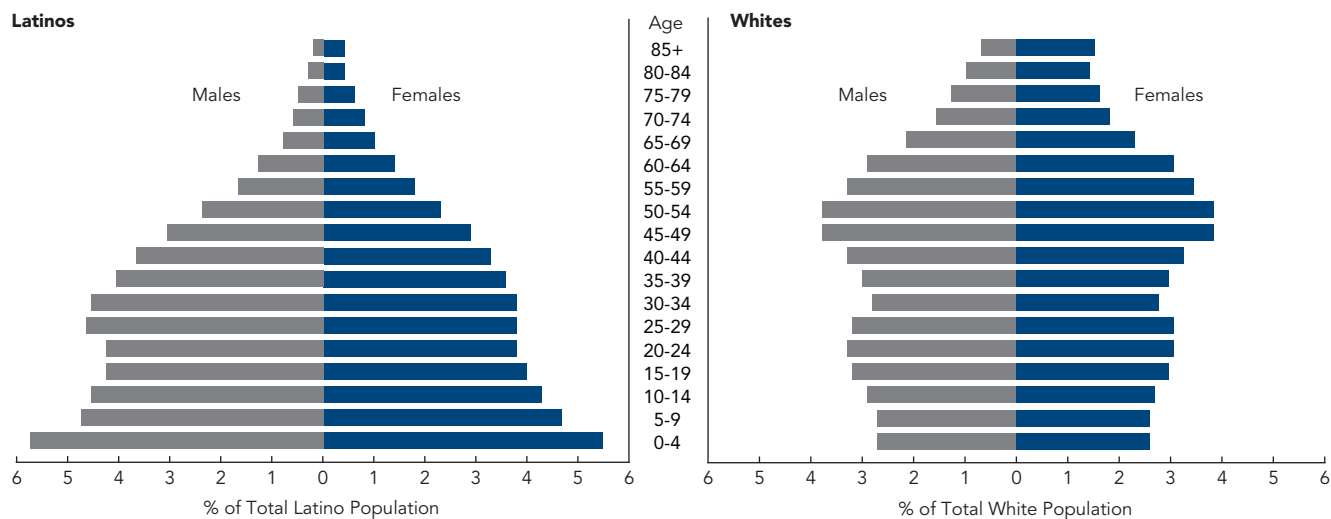
times as many children under 15 years old than persons 65 and older among Latinos. In contrast, there are about an equal share of children and elderly in the white population. Thus, among Latinos there is a large portion of the population that is or will be in the childbearing ages—ages 15 to 44—and a large share who are young and therefore have lower mortality. Given that immigrants tend to be relatively young, they also contribute to the youthfulness of the Latino population.

At the national level, population change occurs through natural increase (births minus deaths) and net international migration. Latina women have on average three births each, one more compared with white, Asian or Pacific Islander, and black women.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Latinos tend to live longer than whites.<sup>3</sup>

There is a major difference in the birth-to-death ratio between whites and Latinos. Between 2000 and 2009 there were approximately 9 million births and slightly over 1 million deaths among Latinos, while among whites there were about 21 million births and 18 million deaths.<sup>4</sup> To put this in perspective, while there are 1.1 births to every 1 death among whites, there are

**FIGURE 1**

**Age-Sex Pyramids for Latinos and Whites in the United States, 2009**



Source: 1% 2009 American Community Survey sample.

8.9 births to every one death among Latinos. This difference has major implications for the widening of the growth rates between Latinos and whites and other groups in the near future.

There were also significant differences in the level of net international migration—the balance between persons who leave the country and those who enter the country. From 2000 to 2009, there was a net increase of 4.8 million Latinos and 1.3 million whites.<sup>5</sup> The net addition of immigrants during the period represented 13.5 percent of the Latino population present in 2000, but only 0.7 percent of the white population in 2000.

While Latinos are often viewed as immigrants, the majority (63 percent) of this population was born in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The newest groups of immigrants among Latinos have the highest percentages of foreign-born: South Americans (66 percent), Central Americans (65 percent), Cubans (59 percent), and Dominicans (57 percent). In contrast, virtually all—99 percent—of Puerto Ricans are U.S.-born.

In accounting for the growth of the Latino population between 2000 and 2009, it is estimated that natural increase (births minus deaths) accounted for 63 percent of the change while net international migration constituted 37 percent.<sup>7</sup> Given that the volume of immigration from Mexico and Latin America has been on the decline in recent years, it is likely that natural increase will become a stronger component of Latino population change in the coming years.<sup>8</sup> Even with waning immigration, the Latino population is expected to grow, although increasingly through natural increase (more births than deaths), resulting in a greater share of Latinos who are U.S.-born.

## Who Are Latinos?

Latinos include diverse people who originate from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain. The recent rapid growth of the Latino population should not overshadow the long history and presence of Latinos in the United States (see box, page 5).

This is particularly the case among Mexicans who originally became part of the United States with the annexation of Texas in 1845 and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in which Mexico ceded much of what is the U.S. Southwest today at the end of the war between the two countries in 1848. The names of cities throughout the Southwest along with the cuisine and architecture of the region evince the deep historical roots of Mexicans in the area. Similarly, Puerto Ricans became linked to the United States in 1898 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris at the end of the Spanish-American War and were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917.

Nonetheless, a significant share of the Latino population has immigrated to the United States only recently. This combination of deep historical ties with recent immigration results in great diversity within the Latino population on the basis of national origin, generational status, language, racial and ethnic identification, and socioeconomic status.

Mexicans are the largest segment of the Latino population in the United States, accounting for two-thirds of Latinos in 2009. The 10-largest segments of the Latino population include Mexican (31,689,879), Salvadoran (1,718,494), Puerto Rican (1,696,141), Cuban (1,696,141), Dominican (1,356,361), Guatemalan (1,081,858), Colombian (899,478), Honduran (631,550),

Spaniard (613,211), and Ecuadorian (605,564). Together, the 10 groups represented 87 percent of all Latinos.

While there has been an increasing dispersion of the Latino population over the last few decades, the group is still clustered in particular areas of the country. For example, close to half (47 percent) of Latinos made their home in California and Texas in 2009. The dozen states with the most Latinos in 2009 are primarily located in the Southwest and South (see Figure 2). Over the last few decades, Georgia, Nevada, and North Carolina have emerged as primary destination areas for Latinos.

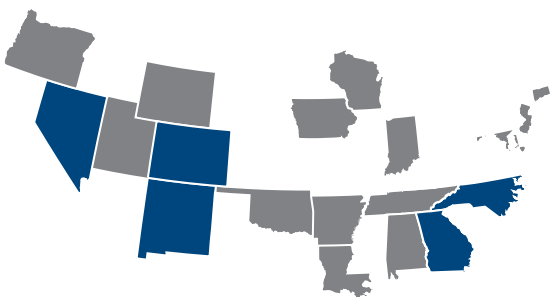
Indeed, the most rapid growth in the Latino population continues to be in areas designated as new destinations for Latinos. The fastest growth in the Latino population between 2000 and 2009 occurred in places located in the South, Midwest, and selected areas of the Northeast and West (see Figure 3).

## A Social and Economic Overview of Latinos

U.S.-born Latinos and foreign-born Latinos face widely different social and economic experiences in the United States. For example, the language that one speaks varies greatly on the basis of nativity status across Latino ethnic groups. Nearly half of all Latinos are bilingual (speaking Spanish at home and speaking English well or very well); 31 percent are monolingual Spanish speakers (speaking Spanish at home and speaking English not well or not at all); and 21 percent are monolingual English speakers (speaking English at home).

However, there are major differences in spoken language across Latino groups that are related to general socioeconomic standing. First, foreign-born individuals are more likely to speak only Spanish compared with their native-born counterparts. Over 40 percent of foreign-born persons speak only Spanish among Mexicans (52 percent), Central Americans (48 percent), Dominicans (45 percent), and Cubans (43 percent). Second, U.S.-born Latinos are more likely to be monolingual English speakers than foreign-born Latinos. Finally, for almost all of the subgroups, regardless of nativity status, the largest segment of the population are bilingual speakers—the exception being foreign-born Mexicans and Central Americans in which the largest part speak only Spanish and among native-born “Other Latinos” in which the largest segment are monolingual Spanish speakers.

Selected social and economic characteristics for Latinos broken down by ethnic group and nativity are shown in the table on page 4. Foreign-born Latinos lag behind their respective native-born counterparts in high school graduation rates, occupational socioeconomic index, median family income, and possession of health insurance. Second, in general, foreign-born individuals have lower rates of joblessness compared with their native-born counterparts. Third, nativity status generally does not affect poverty. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Central Americans have particularly high rates of impoverishment regardless of whether or not they were born in the United States.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

## Selected Social and Economic Characteristics for Latinos by Ethnic Group and Nativity, 2009

| ETHNIC GROUP AND NATIVITY      | PERCENT AGE 25+ HIGH SCHOOL GRADS | PERCENT UNEMPLOYED | AVG. OCCUP. SEI | MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME | PERCENT IN POVERTY | PERCENT WITH NO HEALTH INSURANCE |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Latino</b>                  | 60.9                              | 13.5               | 33.4            | \$36,000             | 23.3               | 31.3                             |
| Mexican Native-Born            | 77.0                              | 13.1               | 39.2            | \$40,590             | 24.2               | 21.0                             |
| Mexican Foreign-Born           | 38.7                              | 10.4               | 24.2            | \$32,000             | 26.2               | 57.1                             |
| Puerto Rican Mainland-Born     | 82.5                              | 15.8               | 41.2            | \$40,000             | 25.1               | 14.7                             |
| Puerto Rican Not Mainland-Born | 63.5                              | 13.1               | 37.4            | \$28,400             | 25.2               | 16.6                             |
| Cuban Native-Born              | 90.8                              | 11.0               | 49.1            | \$56,700             | 13.2               | 15.3                             |
| Cuban Foreign-Born             | 70.8                              | 11.7               | 39.1            | \$33,300             | 17.1               | 29.3                             |
| Dominican Native-Born          | 83.4                              | 17.9               | 41.3            | \$40,000             | 26.7               | 14.8                             |
| Dominican Foreign-Born         | 59.7                              | 12.5               | 30.8            | \$30,000             | 24.2               | 29.0                             |
| Central American Native-Born   | 85.8                              | 15.5               | 41.1            | \$42,800             | 23.9               | 20.3                             |
| Central American Foreign-Born  | 49.6                              | 11.1               | 26.0            | \$35,000             | 20.2               | 54.8                             |
| South American Native-Born     | 93.1                              | 13.5               | 46.3            | \$55,000             | 12.7               | 15.1                             |
| South American Foreign-Born    | 80.9                              | 9.5                | 38.0            | \$44,500             | 12.8               | 35.9                             |
| Other Latino Native-Born       | 83.2                              | 12.0               | 42.0            | \$40,000             | 18.0               | 16.2                             |
| Other Latino Foreign-Born      | 68.4                              | 7.8                | 38.3            | \$42,000             | 17.4               | 30.0                             |
| <b>White</b>                   | 90.4                              | 8.4                | 46.2            | \$51,700             | 9.9                | 10.9                             |

**Source:** Author's estimates using the 2009 1% American Community Survey. The 2009 1% American Community Survey was downloaded from the following source: Steven Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010).

Furthermore, ethnic groups tend to cluster around certain socioeconomic characteristics. The top socioeconomic group includes South Americans, Cubans, and other Latinos. The bottom socioeconomic group includes Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans, with Central Americans falling in the middle. In fact, foreign-born South Americans, Cubans, and other Latinos generally fare better along various socioeconomic dimensions compared with native-born Mexicans and Dominicans and mainland-born Puerto Ricans.

Overall, whites fare better across all socioeconomic indicators. However, native-born Cubans and South Americans have slightly higher levels of high school completion and median family income compared with whites. Still, the majority of Latinos, especially in the case of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans, lag significantly behind whites on all socioeconomic

dimensions. These deficits have major implications for the socioeconomic viability of Latinos in the coming decades.

Latinos have the lowest level of health insurance coverage in the United States.<sup>9</sup> In 2009, close to one-third (31 percent) of Latinos lacked health insurance. Across ethnic groups, foreign-born individuals are much more likely to lack insurance compared with their native-born counterparts. More than half of foreign-born Mexicans (57 percent) and Central Americans (55 percent) lack health insurance. Yet even among some native-born groups, approximately one-fifth do not have any form of insurance. Of course, the lack of health insurance is due to a variety of factors including the type of job that one holds; low-paying jobs generally have no insurance benefits or, at best, limited coverage. Whites have noticeably lower levels of noncoverage compared with all Latino groups.

## Shifting Latino Ethnic and Racial Identity

Over the past several decades, the U.S. Census Bureau has used variations in its attempt to classify and enumerate Latinos. The 1930 Census was the first time that the bureau attempted to identify and count Latinos specifically. At that time, at the height of the mass movement of Mexicans to the United States in the period surrounding the Mexican Revolution and the Great Depression, the bureau designated “Mexican” as a racial category. Approximately 1.4 million people were enumerated as Mexican during the 1930 Census.<sup>1</sup> Most Mexicans lived in Texas (683,681) or California (368,013). With the onset of the Depression, between 400,000 and 500,000 persons of Mexican origin were repatriated to Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

As the Latino population increased and with the advent of the Civil Rights era, efforts were made to provide a label to Latinos as a way to facilitate their enumeration. Prior to the 1970 Census, the labels of “persons of Spanish surname” or “persons of Spanish language” were used to count the population based on the region of the United States. As the 1970 Census neared, the U.S. Interagency Committee on Mexican American Affairs pressured President Nixon to include an item on the census to count Latinos.<sup>3</sup> Although the request came too late for the Hispanic item to be included in the short-form questionnaire, it was included in the 5 percent sample long-form questionnaire.

Seven years later, on May 12, 1977, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) ordered that there would be two ethnic categories for data collection purposes: Hispanic and non-Hispanic.<sup>4</sup> According to the OMB, Hispanics included people from Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin.<sup>5</sup> While the term “Hispanic” became official, there was much debate within the Hispanic and Latino community over the proper term to identify this population. Opponents of the Hispanic term claimed that the term emphasized the Spanish element while neglecting the group’s indigenous roots centered in Latin America. Opponents of the Latino term declared that the term ignores the Spanish roots and excludes people originating from Spain. Today both terms are accepted even though there is often an underlying tension. Nonetheless, a Pew Hispanic Center survey conducted in 2008 indicated that while 43 percent of respondents did not have a preference concerning the two terms, 36 percent preferred the Hispanic identity while 21 percent opted for the Latino label.<sup>6</sup>

Since Hispanics or Latinos are considered an ethnic and not a racial group, they are asked on census questionnaires to select a racial category. In the 2000 Census, almost half (48 percent) of Latinos classified themselves racially as “white” while more than two fifths (43 percent) identified themselves racially as “Other.”<sup>7</sup> The significance of the high percentage that claims that they identify with the “Other” racial category—rather than the “white” classification—is not completely understood. Possibilities include that such persons view Hispanic or Latino as a racial category and do not locate it among the list of choices, while others may use the term as a rejection of white racial identification, and others may be confused about the racial categories.

The Census Bureau has attempted to provide greater clarification in the annual American Community Survey (ACS) and in the 2010 Census in its attempt to move people away from the “Other” racial designation. The questionnaire emphasizes that “Hispanic origins are not races.” In addition, the layout of racial categories is different from the 2000 Census questionnaire.

Such changes in the census questionnaire appear to have changed the way Latinos identify themselves racially. For example, the percentage of Latinos selecting the white racial category increased from 48 percent in the 2000 Census to 63 percent in the 2009 ACS.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, the percentage of Latinos preferring the “Other” racial category dropped from 43 percent to 29 percent. This trend is consistent across Latino subgroups. Cubans have the strongest preference for the white racial category (88 percent). Dominicans have the weakest preference for this racial category (35 percent), opting instead for the “Other” racial category (49 percent).

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Despite the low socioeconomic standing of Latino immigrants and their lack of health insurance, they have low levels of mortality and tend to live long, particularly in the case of Mexican immigrants.<sup>10</sup> This pattern is commonly referred to as the “epidemiological paradox” or the “Mexican immigrant paradox.” Various explanations have been put forth to account for the paradox, including migrant selectivity from the home country, a protective immigrant culture or lifestyle, and methodological and data limitations.

The current economic recession has had sweeping effects on the social and economic standing of all groups. Between 2000 and 2009, whites and Latinos experienced increases of about 4 percentage points in their unemployment rates. Among all Latinos, the unemployment rates of the native-born rose more than those of foreign-born Latinos, with unemployment rates of native-born Central Americans, South Americans, and Cubans rising the most.

After adjusting for inflation between 1999 and 2008, the median family income of Latinos declined somewhat faster than that of whites (-7.1 percent vs. -5.9 percent, respectively). Median family incomes of foreign-born Latinos declined more than native-born Latinos, with income declines greatest among foreign-born Cubans (-19 percent), Mexicans (-13 percent), Puerto Ricans (-10 percent), Central Americans (-10 percent), and Dominicans (-9 percent). In contrast, the median income of several groups rose somewhat, with the greatest gains posted by native-born Dominicans (11 percent) and foreign-born “Other” Latinos (8 percent).

## Latinos and the Future of the U.S.

Over the last few decades, U.S. population growth has been fueled by a youthful Latino population. Today, half of all people added to the U.S. population in a given year are Latino, and this share will increase in the coming decades. As of the start of 2011, the United States will see a major aging of its population as the first cohort of baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) reaches retirement age. As is already the case in states such as Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas, the opposite ends of the national age spectrum will feature a predominantly white elderly population and an increasingly Latino youth population.

America’s demographic script is set and will result in a nation made up increasingly of Latinos. Population projections suggest that the Latino population will nearly triple from an estimate of 49.7 million in 2010 to 132.8 million in 2050.<sup>11</sup> It is expected that about two-thirds of the U.S. projected population growth during this 40-year period will be due to the growth in the Latino population. By 2050, Latinos could represent three of every 10 persons in the United States.

Latinos will increasingly be part of all societal institutions as both consumers and purveyors of services. Latinos need to be viewed as an asset that provides major benefits for the economy rather than as a liability that drains the economy.

Given that Latinos continue to have the lowest levels of education across racial and ethnic groups, it is crucial that investments be made in the schooling of these youth to ensure that they are adequately prepared to contribute to the economy in an increasingly technological and global workforce. The future of the United States will increasingly be tied to the fortunes of its Latino population.

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