

Issue Brief: Latino Americans and Public Opinion

**Key Words**

Latino Americans, Public Opinion, Immigration, Education, Economy

**Description**

This issue brief outlines the general concerns of the Latino American population regarding their perception towards the issues of immigration, education, and the economy. It also discusses the regional dispersion of Latino Americans and the impact of demographics in addressing these issues.

**Key Points**

- Latino Americans represent a relatively young and growing population which collectively accounts for the second largest ethnic group in the United States
- Issues of public opinion within this demographic are important to specific policy development and political officials due to their impact as a constituent group
- When polled in Feb of 2011, Latino Americans listed immigration, education, and economic stability as their top three concerns
- Nearly two-thirds of the Latino American population reside in one of four states; California, Texas, Florida, and New York

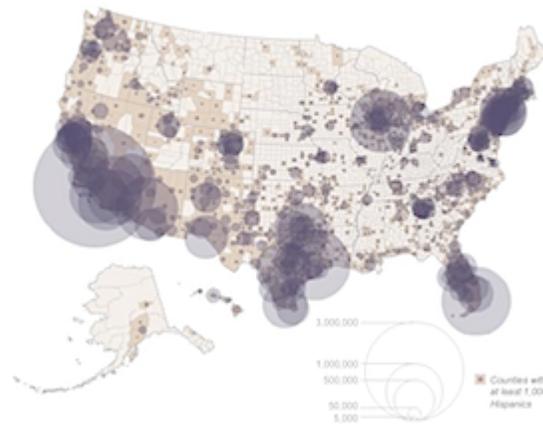
**Issue Brief**

The Latino American population is comprised of predominantly Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central American, South American, and Cuban origins, but includes approximately 23 different ethnic origins as listed on the 2000 U.S. Census.

According to the 2004 American Community Survey published by the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 72% of Latino Americans were U.S. citizens either by birth (~61%) or naturalization (~11%). In 2008 “Hispanics” accounted for 9% of the

national electorate, voting consistently higher for Democratic candidates versus Republican, with an average margin of 30.5% between the two from 1980 to 2008. However, this demographic represents a relatively higher percentage in the four “border states” (across Mexico) New Mexico, Texas, California, and Arizona, as well as Florida and New York.

### U.S. Hispanic Population by County 2008

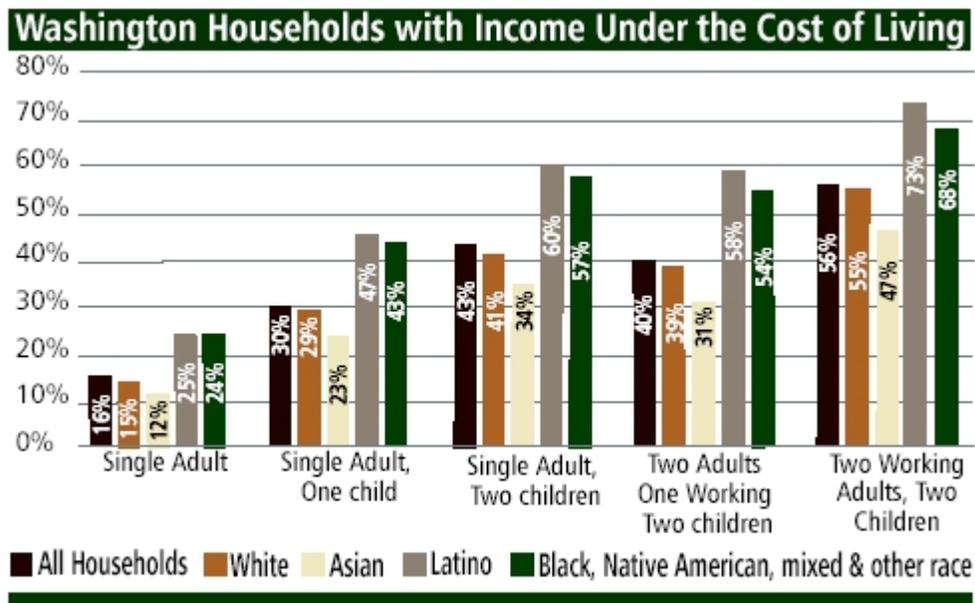


There are a number of concerns regarding the official policy of immigration into the United States. This is due in large part to the duality of sentiment expressed across the country and in various states by members within the Latino American community as well as those outside of it. In an article published on June 25 2007 in The Washington Post titled *Illegal Immigrants Targeted by States*, Rep. Bill Faison (D) of North Carolina (who chairs the Agribusiness Committee) stated, “There are a lot of people here who would like to take every immigrant here and ship them home. But those same people are buying the houses that they build and taking their services. It's a schizophrenic view.” In turn

Latino Americans are seeking to make their voices heard on a larger scale and have even taken to forms of social protest such as the marches in California in April of 2006 titled “A Day Without a Mexican”, meant to highlight the contributions that the Latino community makes to the state economy by relinquishing their roles within it. According to a recent poll of Latino constituents by BusinessWire, one of the multimedia extensions of Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway, “When asked what are the most important issues facing the Latino community that Congress and the President should address, respondents ranked immigration, 47% as top priority followed by the economy 44%, Education and health followed with 20% and 12% respectively.”

The role that education plays in the lives of Latino Americans is vital to their individual and collective success in the U.S. As cited in the American Community Survey, “about 22 percent of Hispanics were living below the poverty level...the poverty rate was generally higher for Hispanic children (under age 18). About 29 percent of Hispanic children and 11 percent of non-Hispanic White children lived in poverty.” The implicit correlation between poverty and access to education is understood to impact not just those living in poverty now, but future generations as well. Latinos are a relatively younger demographic compared to non-Hispanic Whites with a rate of about 1 in 3 being children compared to 1 in 5, according to the ACS. Beyond the link to poverty and low SES, education presents the opportunity for expansion into various job markets, a vital aspect of growth and stability. ACS notes that, “Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to work in service, construction, and production jobs” which are sensitive to economic conditions and offer less in terms of upwards mobility.

On a micro scale, concern with jobs is by virtue an extension of the macro concern of many, including the Latino population, regarding the health of the American economy. In the poll cited earlier by BusinessWire, Monica Lozano CEO of impreMedia stated, “This poll is a clear indicator that Latinos are concerned with the economy. It is impacting the way they live...Latinos are worried about their jobs and their ability to pay their bills. Latinos have a huge impact on the economy and policy makers need to address the concerns that they are voicing.” When the economy contracts, the focus shifts to areas concerning discretionary spending and income as a means to control costs. Often this means that certain labor-specific trades are no longer in high demand and a general leaning out of the job market results in increased competition among potential employees. Considering the aversive nature of the immigration debate combined with the educational disparity among the Latino community, it is no wonder that the economy and potential for economic stability are weighing on the hearts and minds many Latin Americans.



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