

Issue Brief:

Latino Socio-economic Status/Class

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Key Words:

Latino, socio-economic status, immigration, education, language, employment

Description:

This brief serves to provide an analysis of some the implicative factors which affect the current socio-economic status of Latinos in the United States. Important focal points will be topics/issues which are currently at the forefront of political concerns within the Latino community such as immigration, education and language, and employment.

Key Points:

- Discriminatory legislation against the Latino community: SB 1070.
- Social conflicts: Language debate and racist sentiments towards Latinos
- Social interaction improvement tactic: bi-lingual education
- Economic factors: Unemployment disproportion and poverty rates

Issue Brief

The United States has undoubtedly been built upon the social interactions of immigrants and natives merging cultural differences to create the diverse nation that exists today. Ironically, many of the ethnoracial groups – immigrants and immigrant descendents – don't experience the fruits of the labor that their lineage has historically produced. Their categorization as “minority” has had social implications associated with disadvantage and inequality causing some to view the term with a negative connotation. This negative perception along with discriminatory practices can be arguably seen as a cause of a lowered socio-economic status for minorities. An example of this can be seen through the examination of a few status factors for the Latino population; currently the fastest growing population in the United States.

While legal immigration has been valued for its beneficial cultural exchanges, the steady increase of illegal immigration has been considered detrimental to the American society. For example, in 2004 in California, it was estimated that illegal immigration – mostly Latino

immigrants from Mexico - cost the state over \$10 billion dollars annually. This includes costs in the sectors of education, health care and incarceration. The funds used to afford such charges were paid by taxpayers translating into a \$1,183 annual cost to the average household. Similar situations have occurred in other states causing sentiments of resentment towards Latino immigrants by many American citizens as they see the illegal immigrants aiding to committed crimes and costing them tax dollars – which many illegal immigrants don't pay - to be maintained. This resentment has morphed into racial discrimination against many Latinos whom are American citizens. There is not greater example of this than that of Arizona's recent passage of Senate Bill 1070 or the "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act." SB 1070 has cause a stir of opposition both within the state and across America as The U.S. and Arizona supreme courts have held that race may be considered in enforcing immigration law. In *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce*, the U.S. Supreme Court found "The likelihood that any given person of Mexican ancestry is an alien is high enough to make Mexican appearance a relevant factor." This causes great concerns over potential civil rights violations within the Latino community and unites them in their fight for social equality.

Language has also been a unifying factor for Latinos in America but has contrastingly been a source of division between English speaking Americans and Spanish-only speaking Latino immigrants. There is a notion that many Latinos who don't learn English create an atmosphere of exclusion from American society. According to Author Leo R. Chavez, "Pundits—and oftentimes the media at large—nurture and perpetuate the notion that Latinos are an invading force bent on re-conquering land once considered their own. Through a perceived refusal to learn English and an "out of control" birthrate, many argue that Latinos are destroying the American way of life." Chavez also questions these assumptions and offers counter evidence in an attempt to debunk the myth that Latinos are a threat to the security and prosperity of the nation in his book *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Ironically, there is no official language decreed at the Federal level in the United States as English has been adopted as the *de facto* national language of the United States. To bridge the language divide many programs have been put in place to help immigrants learn English as well as the creation of bilingual taught classes in many elementary schools.

Opponents of bilingual education felt that Latinos should be obligated to learn English when they live in a majorly English speaking country. They also argued that it should not be the responsibility of Boards of Education to spend more money from already tight budgets to accommodate them. An example of this was shown in Colorado in 2002 when Denver government officials attempted to pass legislation against bilingual teaching. The Colorado English Amendment 31 was on the November 2002 ballot in Colorado and was narrowly defeated (50.8% to 49.2%). The measure would have required that all public school students be taught in English unless they are exempted under the proposal. If Latino school children who don't speak English are not instructed in their native language while learning English, they will have difficulty grasping the material being taught and put at an economic disadvantage as they

will be less likely to continue on to higher education institutions and won't be able to work in positions which require fluency in the English language.

The education gap has recently shown its effects in limiting job opportunities to the Latino community. In the past few years no one ethnic group has been immune to the effects of the U.S. recession, but research conducted by the Population Reference Bureau has shown that Latino men may be feeling the effects more than other demographic groups. PRB found that Latino men have been disproportionately affected by unemployment due to the dwindling demand for new homes and remodeling of commercial real estate. When the recession began in 2007, nearly one fourth of Latino men were working in the blue collar construction industry. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also estimated that about 2 million construction jobs were lost between December 2007 and January 2010. In 2008 41 percent of Latino men ages 25 and older had not graduated from high school limiting access to white collar jobs with better wages. Younger Latino men were also less likely to enroll in college compared with white students of the same age. In the same year poverty levels ranged from 3 percent amongst Latinos with graduate or professional degrees to 24 percent amongst Latinos whom didn't finish high school.

The statistics are exemplary of the socio-economic adversities facing the Latino community today. While illegal immigration does have its problematic effects on society discriminatory tactics should not be feasible in an attempt to control this issue as it allows for many to experience a socio-economic hardship living in the American society.



Two of the nine protesters who chained themselves to the Arizona Capitol's doors in protest of SB 1070



Parents and students march in defense of bilingual education, Denver, 13 October 2002. Amendment 31 to Colorado constitution, which would have forced students into English "immersion" program, was defeated.

HOUSEHOLD DATA

Table A-3. Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age

[Numbers in thousands]

Employment status, sex, and age	Not seasonally adjusted			Seasonally adjusted ⁽¹⁾					
	June 2009	May 2010	June 2010	June 2009	Feb. 2010	Mar. 2010	Apr. 2010	May 2010	June 2010
HISPANIC OR LATINO ETHNICITY									
Civilian noninstitutional population	32,839	33,578	33,662	32,839	33,335	33,414	33,498	33,578	33,662
Civilian labor force	22,403	22,633	22,724	22,348	22,648	22,707	22,684	22,789	22,674
Participation rate	68.2	67.4	67.5	68.1	67.9	68.0	67.7	67.9	67.4
Employed	19,685	20,033	19,922	19,609	19,848	19,848	19,850	19,953	19,854
Employment-population ratio	59.9	59.7	59.2	59.7	59.5	59.4	59.3	59.4	59.0
Unemployed	2,718	2,600	2,802	2,739	2,800	2,859	2,834	2,836	2,820
Unemployment rate	12.1	11.5	12.3	12.3	12.4	12.6	12.5	12.4	12.4
Not in labor force	10,436	10,945	10,938	10,491	10,687	10,706	10,814	10,789	10,989
Men, 20 years and over									
Civilian labor force	12,642	12,887	12,965	-	-	-	-	-	-
Participation rate	82.7	82.5	82.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	11,290	11,469	11,500	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employment-population ratio	73.9	73.4	73.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unemployed	1,352	1,417	1,466	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unemployment rate	10.7	11.0	11.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Women, 20 years and over									
Civilian labor force	8,527	8,752	8,700	-	-	-	-	-	-
Participation rate	59.1	59.5	59.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	7,542	7,853	7,741	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employment-population ratio	52.2	53.4	52.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unemployed	985	898	958	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unemployment rate	11.5	10.3	11.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both sexes, 16 to 19 years									
Civilian labor force	1,234	995	1,059	-	-	-	-	-	-
Participation rate	39.6	30.7	32.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	854	710	681	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employment-population ratio	27.4	21.9	21.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unemployed	381	285	378	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unemployment rate	30.8	28.6	35.7	-	-	-	-	-	-

Footnotes
 (1) The population figures are not adjusted for seasonal variation; therefore, identical numbers appear in the unadjusted and seasonally adjusted columns.

- Data not available.
 NOTE: Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

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