

New Orleans's Latinos:  
Growth in an uncertain destination

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Abstract:

Latino immigrants arrived in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005. The recovery economy has brought a steady stream of Latino migrant workers, but demand has been spatially and temporally uneven. As rebuilding progress has slowed and wages have dropped the growth of Latinos in the city appears to be leveling off, though not declining. However, little is known about the post-Katrina newcomers. Using survey data collected at visits of the mobile consulates of Mexican, Brazil, and Nicaragua, we investigate the expected durations of these national origin groups. We find that the best predictors of staying in New Orleans are owning a home, being accompanied by spouses and/or children, and having been a pre-Katrina resident. The post-Katrina arrivals appear to be either very mobile or uncertain about their stay in New Orleans.

Introduction

Latino immigrants arrived in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005. The recovery economy has brought a steady stream of Latino migrant workers, but demand has been spatially and temporally uneven. As rebuilding progress has slowed and wages have dropped the growth of Latinos in the city appears to be leveling off, though not declining. These irregularities in demand suggest that any point estimates of the Latino population are quickly out-dated and therefore of limited use, although it is clear that the Hispanic population has grown considerably in the past two years. In 2005 before the hurricane, 3.1 and 8.1 percent of the populations of Orleans and Jefferson Parishes was Latino respectively<sup>i</sup>. The only population estimate to include a measure of race and ethnicity after the hurricane occurred in August 2006 and estimated the Latino populations of these parishes to be 9.6 and 9.7 percent respectively – an increase in its relative and absolute size<sup>ii</sup>. Understanding how New Orleans' may be changed by this new group is best accomplished by studying the migratory behavior and intentions of the newcomers.

Previous research carried out by Fussell has found that the newcomer Latino population is quite diverse though dominated by migrants from Mexico and Honduras, with smaller numbers from other Central and South American countries<sup>iii</sup>. The visits of the mobile consulates from these countries provide an opportunity to efficiently collect survey data about the migratory behavior and intentions of the newcomer Latino immigrants. There is great interest in how long these migrants are likely to stay in New Orleans, as well as what their employment, residential, and social experiences have been in the city. The focus of this paper is on understanding how this population is likely to change the racial and ethnic composition of New Orleans's population.

How long migrants plan to stay is measured both directly and indirectly, by looking at the stated migratory intentions, and the characteristics and behavior of the migrants. The surveys at the Brazilian, Mexican, and Nicaraguan consulates garnered

samples of 66, 157, and 54 respondents, respectively, for a total of 277 interviews. (More surveys are planned for fall 2007). Between 18 and 27% of each national sample responded that they planned to stay 12 months or less or until the work runs out (Table 1). Fifty five percent and 67% of Nicaraguans and Brazilians, respectively, said they planned to stay permanently or more than a year, though only 38.5% of Mexicans answered this way. Nearly a third of Mexicans answered that they did not know how long they would stay, while the proportions were smaller for the Brazilians and Nicaraguans. The variation in the distribution of expected durations of each national origin group is likely to be related to the proportion of pre-Katrina residents in each sample, the migratory patterns each groups has developed within the U.S., and the labor market dynamics of their previous location within the U.S. These will be discussed at greater length in the full paper.

The characteristics and behaviors of migrants also shed light on whether respondents are likely to become long-term residents of New Orleans. The results show that the majority of each group is undocumented. Without a clear pathway to residency or citizenship, undocumented migrants are unlikely to make long-term plans to remain in the U.S. The average profile of migrants is an unaccompanied male in their mid thirties. Although this does not describe all of the migrants the majority conforms to the stereotype of the sojourner male migrant seeking employment and who is likely to move on if better opportunities arise elsewhere. However, there are non-trivial numbers of migrant families who may be more likely to stay. These preliminary results offer important information about the migratory behavior of Latino newcomers in New Orleans. The methodology, described below, suggests that this means of surveying the population is the best approach for efficiently generating a representative sample of the newcomer Latinos in New Orleans.

#### Consular surveys in New Orleans

During the summer of 2007 the consulates of Brazil, Mexico, and Honduras made visits to New Orleans to offer consular services to their nationals residing in New Orleans. These countries do not have permanent consulates in the city. These visits generally involved issuing passports, identity cards, and other government certificates, such as birth, death, and marriage certificates. Surveying at this event is likely to produce a sample that is more recently arrived, less likely to have naturalized, and more likely to be undocumented than a representative sample of the foreign-born in the U.S. from each country. Since I am interested in understanding the dynamics of the recently arrived, this is an acceptable bias. There is no sampling frame with which to compare it, however.

The survey includes questions about the sociodemographic characteristics, migratory, employment, and residential behavior, social networks, and experiences with employer abuse, police maltreatment, and crime in New Orleans. The survey was carried out by teams of bi-lingual interviewers who approached respondents as they were waiting for their documents to be processed. The respondents were offered a international phone card as an incentive to participate and generally they were cooperative and friendly. Since the surveys took place within the consulate they felt safe to speak about confidential issues, particularly their legal status.

## Preliminary analysis

The independent variables used to predict expected durations in New Orleans are categorized into those theorized to predict permanency and mobility, though these are often two sides of the same coin. Legal status, age, gender, marital status, parenthood, the location of family members, homeownership and being a pre-Katrina resident are all expected to be associated with permanency. Prior migratory behavior is theorized to predict mobility. I modeled two binary dependent variables. The first, permanency, measures whether the person says they will stay more than a year or permanently versus saying they will stay less than a year or they don't know how long they will stay. The second, mobility, measures whether they say they will stay less than a year versus staying longer than a year, permanently, or they don't know. This preliminary exercise showed that the permanency model was more robust than the mobility model.

The permanency model show that three variables significantly increased the odds of a respondent saying that they would stay more than a year or permanently. Owning a home, not surprisingly, increased the odds of staying by a factor of 7.5. While pre-Katrina Latinos are more likely to have owned homes in New Orleans and benefited from homeowners insurance payments or federal aid for rebuilding, some newcomers also purchased homes that were damaged and applied their own construction skills to rebuilding. Respondents accompanied by spouses and/or children were 5 times more likely to answer that they would remain for a year or longer or permanently. Pre-Katrina residents were nearly 4 times as likely to say they were going to stay then the newcomers. These effects are likely to be correlated, but even controlling for this in the logistic regression, they have strong effects. The mobility model found only one variable, having lived in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina, significantly predicted lower odds of answering that the person planned to stay less than a year. Interestingly, Brazilians also have lower odds of mobility than Nicaraguans, though this is only significant at the .05 level.

Many stakeholders in New Orleans want to know whether the increase in the size of the Latino population after Katrina is permanent or temporary. This research sheds light on this question and suggests that the post-Katrina increase is due to a highly mobile construction labor force that is likely to stay only as long as there is a construction boom in the region. The longer that boom lasts, the more likely some are to put down roots there, but this is yet another one of the uncertainties inherent in the recovery process.

Table 1. Migratory intentions of Brazilians, Mexicans, and Nicaraguans

	BZ	MX	NC
Plans to stay in New Orleans			
12 months or until work ends	17.5	27.3	23.4
More than a year or permanently	66.7	38.5	55.3
Don't know	15.9	34.3	21.3

Table 2. Migratory characteristics suggesting permanency

	BZ	MX	NC
Legal status			
U.S. citizen	1.5	2.1	10.6
Permission to work and live in U.S.	12.3	5.2	19.6
Undocumented	86.2	93.7	70.2
% Male	78.8	77.2	82.0
Mean age (std. dev.)	33.7 (10.4)	33.0 (10.0)	38.8 (13.0)
Family location			
With respondent	10.8	23.8	10.0
In country of origin	52.3	37.4	54.0
Elsewhere in U.S. or only some with respondent	9.2	7.5	12.0
No spouse or children	27.7	31.3	24.0
Residential tenancy			
Owns home	1.5	8.1	18.0
Rents home	93.9	79.3	70.0
Other arrangement	5.6	22.6	22.0
% pre-Katrina residents of New Orleans (missing=42) need to deal with this.	11.5	29.8	46.7

Table 3. Migratory characteristics suggesting mobility

	BZ	MX	NC
Duration of most recent U.S. trip (median years)	2.4	2.7	3.1
Number of U.S. destinations on current trip (median)	2.0	2.0	1.0
Number of U.S. trips			
First U.S. trip	90.9	65.2	90.4
Second U.S. trip	3.0	18.4	5.8
Third or higher order U.S. trip	6.1	16.4	3.8
Previous place lived/worked			
Origin country	9.4	33.6	70.0
Texas	0.0	28.1	10.0
Other Southern states	34.4	20.6	14.0
Western states	1.6	8.2	6.0
Mid-Western states	1.6	5.5	0.0
Northeastern states	53.1	4.1	0.0

Table 4. Logistic regressions predicting mobility and permanency

	Mobility		Permanency	
	Odds	Prob<.05	Odds	Prob<.05
Brazilian	0.3	<.05	1.0	
Mexican	1.1		1.2	
Age	1.0		1.0	
Sex (male)	1.2		1.6	
Undocumented	0.8		0.4	
With family	0.6		5.2	<.0001
Owens home	0.3		7.5	<.0001
Pre-Katrina resident	0.3	<.01	3.7	<.0001
U.S. Trips	1.0		1.0	
In U.S. before New Orleans	1.0		1.2	
DF	10		10	
LLR Chi-square	23.1		50.1	
Probability	<.01		<.0001	

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References

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2005 American Community Survey, General Characteristics. Orleans Parish and Jefferson Parish. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

<sup>ii</sup> Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. 2006. Louisiana Health and Population Survey: Expanded Preliminary Results: Orleans Parish, October 6, 2006. [http://popest.org](http://popest.org;); Fussell, Elizabeth. 2006. "Latino/a Immigrants in Post-Katrina New Orleans: A Research Report." *World on the Move* Vol. 13(2): 2-4.

<sup>iii</sup> Elizabeth Fussell. Forthcoming. Post-Katrina New Orleans as a New Migrant Destination, *Displaced City: Hurricane Katrina and the Repopulations of New Orleans*. Elizabeth Fussell and James R. Elliott, editors.; Louisiana Environmental Action Network and the Latino Health Outreach Project of the Common Ground Health Clinic. 2007. Latino Day Laborer health and Safety in Post-Katrina New Orleans. June 7, 2007.