

Hispanic Natural Increase: A Growing Source of Population Growth In Urban and Rural America

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Until recently, the large majority of Hispanics resided in the American Southwest—California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado (Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2004). Today about one-half of all Hispanics lived outside these traditional gateway states. The amnesty provisions of the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act (IRCA) gave unskilled Hispanics workers a “new freedom” of geographic mobility that allowed them, for the first time, to pursue emerging low-skill, low-wage job opportunities (e.g., meat-processing plants) elsewhere in the country (Kandel and Parrado 2005). Indeed, America’s Hispanic population—both native- and foreign-born—are rapidly diffusing spatially, especially into smaller metropolitan cities and less-densely settled small towns and rural areas in the South and Midwest (Donato et al. 2007; Lichter and Johnson 2007). This growing Hispanic populations have transformed many small communities, while also raising new concerns about uneasy racial relations, flagging immigrant incorporation, and the putative new burdens on local taxpayers (e.g., bilingual education, taxes and welfare) (Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2004).

The broad outlines of these newly emerging settlement patterns among Hispanics are now widely recognized. And, not surprisingly, most discussions of immigration policy have centered on the resettlement patterns of Hispanics. Kandel and Cromartie (2004), for example, showed that Hispanics accounted for roughly 25 percent of nonmetropolitan population growth in the 1990s. Our goal here is to redirect attention from Hispanic in-migration to natural increase as *the* major engine of recent population growth. First, we update previous analyses of the 1990s (e.g., Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Lichter and Johnson 2006) with new primary analyses of the demographic components of Hispanic population change for the post-2000 period. More importantly, we establish that natural increase has come to play a large and unappreciated role in the growth of America's Hispanic population. These objectives are addressed using recently-released county data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Federal State Cooperative Population Estimates Series and special tabulations of vital statistics data provided by the National Center for Health Statistics.

Current Study

We paint a compelling new demographic portrait of rural and urban America, one being redrawn by the infusion of Hispanics in-migrants and high fertility. This analysis provides a window to America's future. Current trends—high rates of in-migration and natural increase of Hispanics—portent continuing growth that will reshape the social and cultural fabric of many communities for decades to come. More importantly, the rapid ascendancy of Hispanics in America is likely to continue, whether restrictive immigration legislation is enacted or not. The growth of the Hispanic

population, fueled increasingly by nature increase, has taken on a demographic momentum of its own.

Preliminary Findings

Hispanic population gains have been fueled by both natural increase and net migration. Net migration provided the bulk of the Hispanic population gain during the 1990s. In metro areas, migration accounted for 57 percent of the overall Hispanic gain in the 1990s. The gains due to net migration were even larger in nonmetro areas: Some 67 percent of the Hispanic population gain of 1,044,000 came from migration. Much of this gain in Hispanic population were due to immigration. But recent research suggests that some of the net Hispanic migration gain in rural areas also resulted from movement out of traditional Hispanic settlement areas in the Southwest and elsewhere (Lichter and Johnson 2006).ⁱ

What about natural increase? The growing importance of Hispanic natural increase is clearly reflected in the post 2000 data. Between 2000 and 2005, *most* of the Hispanic population increase came from natural increase rather than migration, both in metro and nonmetro areas. More than 58 percent of the nonmetro Hispanic increase and 55 percent of the metro Hispanic population gain was fueled by natural increase. Natural increase is now the engine of Hispanic population growth.

The growing impact of natural increase reflects extremely high birth to death ratio in the Hispanic population. Between 2000 and 2005, there were 5.7 births for every death in the Hispanic population in rural areas. This ratio was even higher in metro areas—

7.8 births per death. This ratio contrasts sharply with the overall birth-to-death ratio of 1.2 in nonmetro areas and 1.8 in metro. The pronounced difference between Hispanic and overall birth to death ratios reflects three interrelated factors. First, Hispanic population is much younger than the U.S. population (median age of Hispanics is 27 compared to 36 for the U.S. as a whole) resulting in proportionately more women of child-bearing age. Second, Hispanic age specific fertility levels are higher for Hispanic women at every age from 15 to 29. Finally, the youthfulness of the Hispanic population produces a paucity of deaths because few Hispanics are in age groups at high risk of mortality.

The demographic impact of Hispanic population dynamics is perhaps best reflected in the demographic components of change on U.S. population growth. Hispanics represented 12.5 percent of the U.S. population in 2000. Yet, they accounted for 49 percent of the U.S. population gain between 2000 and 2005. Hispanics contributed 52.5 percent of the net migration gain (immigration) during the period and 47 percent of all the natural increase in the country. In metro areas, where they represented 14.1 percent of the population, they accounted for 50 percent of the population increase, 46.6 percent of the natural increase, and 53.9 percent of the migration gain. Even more remarkable is that Hispanics comprised only 5.4 percent of the nonmetro population, but accounted for 45.5 percent of its overall population gain. They accounted for 53.4 percent of the natural increase and 37.8 percent of the net migration gain in nonmetro areas.

To be sure, over the long term, Hispanic natural increase will likely diminish as the population ages and the number of births diminishes. For the immediate future,

however, Hispanic natural increase is likely to contribute a substantial excess of births over deaths to U.S. population increases.

Discussion

Public policy discourse centered on rapid immigration and new immigrant destinations has sometimes distracted us from fully recognizing the growing impact of Hispanic natural increase. The Hispanic population is dispersing rapidly from traditional gateway cities in the Southwest into suburban areas of large metro areas, smaller metro places, nonmetro communities, and rural areas. To be sure, the new growth of Hispanics—both native-born and immigrants—has reshaped the social and cultural fabric of many communities over the past decade (Jensen 2006; Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Unlike previous work, however, we provides the first systematic examination of the population-growth-inducing effects attributable to Hispanic natural increase (rather than net migration or immigration alone)

Our empirical results suggest that Hispanic natural increase is an important but often ignored demographic component of population growth in nonmetro areas. Its relative impact on growth is also accelerating. Well over one-half of Hispanic population growth over the 2000-2005 period was due to natural increases. This figure compared with about one-third of Hispanic growth for the 1990s. Clearly, the secondary effect of rapid in-migration of Hispanics since the 1990s is now revealed in fertility. Through high fertility and a concentration of population in the young adults groups, Hispanic population growth has become self-sustaining, even if immigration were to be seriously curtailed through new restrictive legislation. The long-term question, of course, is

whether new Hispanic in-migrants will stay or leave their new communities, and whether generational succession (and cultural assimilation) will ultimately dampen high fertility rates. Population aging and higher mortality over the next few decades—in the absence of out-migration—will certainly slow Hispanic natural increase and population growth.

Finally, our results paint a compelling new demographic portrait of both urban and rural America, one showing a growing number of areas being transformed demographically by new Hispanic arrivals. The current analysis also provides a window to America's future. Current trends—high rates of in-migration and natural increase of Hispanics—portend continuing rural growth and are certain to reshape the social fabric of many communities for decades to come. The ascendancy of the Hispanic population is unlikely to stall anytime soon, whether restrictive immigration legislation is enacted or not. Indeed, as our results suggest, the growth of the Hispanic population, fueled increasingly by natural increase, has taken on a demographic momentum of its own. Interestingly enough, population scholars have lamented for decades the decline of small towns, a result of persistent rural out-migration and economic stagnation in much of nonmetro America (see Johnson and Fuguitt 2000). Today, a new set of most interesting and controversial questions arise from the population growth and racial diversity spreading across much of the rural landscape.

ⁱ The foreign-born population represents only 30 percent of the nonmetro Hispanic population, although a growing share of Hispanics in-migrants to rural areas appears to be arriving directly from Latin America countries (Kandel and Cromartie 2004).ⁱ Recent research suggests that there is considerable movement of Hispanics within the United States (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Lichter and Johnson 2006).

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