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**Social and Economic Integration of Latino Immigrants in New Rural Destinations**

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## **Introduction**

Latino immigrants are the fastest growing group in rural America. Data since 2000 show large, unanticipated increases in the Latino population throughout all regions of the country (Guzmán & McConnell 2002). Rural (i.e., non-metropolitan) Latino population growth rates have surpassed those of urban areas, as well as those of all other racial and ethnic groups in metro and non-metro areas (Kandel & Cromartie 2004). Latinos are dispersing to new destinations in the Midwest and Southeast, and for the first time in U.S. history, half of all rural Latinos now live outside the traditional Southwestern settlement region. Many rural Latino residents migrate from larger metropolitan areas in search of better paying jobs, lower cost housing, safer schools and a higher quality of life (Fennelly 2005; Hernández-León & Zúñiga 2000). In turn, rural-based industries, such as meat processing and other manufacturing industries are recruiting workers to meet their rising demand for mostly low-skilled and low-paying jobs. The result has been widespread Latino population dispersion punctuated by concentration: while almost all 2,289 non-metropolitan counties experienced Latino population growth during the 1990s, 30 percent of growth occurred in just 149 “rapid Hispanic growth” counties (Kandel & Cromartie 2004).

Rural areas are arguably undergoing a more dramatic social, economic, and cultural transformation from recent Latino population growth than urban areas (Salamon 2002). Demographically, Latinos comprised less than 6 percent of all non-metro residents in 2000, yet they accounted for 25 percent of all non-metro population growth between 1990 and 2000. Over 100 rural counties would have lost population between 1990 and 2000 without Latino immigration (Kandel & Cromartie 2004).

While Latinos typically fill jobs in rural areas that might otherwise disappear, Latino population growth also creates challenges for rural communities by altering and often increasing public expenditures for public schools, affordable housing and other services. Recent Latino immigrants differ socio-demographically from rural native-born residents: on average, they are considerably younger, less educated, speak little English, and frequently lack legal status, all of which hinder their socioeconomic incorporation and mobility (Parrado & Kandel 2006). Many rural communities are unprepared for the challenges presented by significant numbers of culturally distinct, low-paid newcomers who seek inexpensive housing, require distinct social services, and struggle to learn English. These challenges have resulted in visible social and political conflict in rural communities, as documented in media reports and academic studies (e.g. Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005; Millard, Chapa & Burrillo 2005).

### **Latino Immigrant Integration**

Prospects for Latinos in contemporary rural America hinge on the same mechanisms for social and economic mobility utilized by earlier generations of U.S. immigrants. These include acquiring work experience, English language skills, training and education, and legal status, as well as overcoming discrimination and prejudice. Our study conceptualizes immigrant integration as a “two-way process in which both newcomers and host societies influence each other” (Migration Policy Institute 2006). This framework accounts for variation in immigrant characteristics (e.g. country of origin, year of arrival ) and rural host community characteristics (e.g. economic base, availability of health and social assistance) (Carranza & Gouveia 2002). The research focuses on four principal characteristics of integration influenced by both migrant and community characteristics: (1) residential permanence, (2) economic security, (2) civic

incorporation, and (3) family formation. While these characteristics have been addressed in previous case studies, they have generally not been systematically analyzed for rural areas using quantitative data.

**1. Residential Permanence** occurs when immigrants stay within one community on a year-round basis. Latino immigrants in rural communities often work in seasonal occupations such as agricultural work, meat processing, low-skilled manufacturing, and service employment that may be associated with temporary residence. Temporary residence may be a choice by “target earners” who intend to return to their home countries (Massey, Durand, & Malone 2002). Some immigrants desire to “settle out” within rural communities, but lack the resources to weather potential spells of unemployment or find long-term housing (Salamon 2002). Consequently, in new destination states in the Midwest and Southeast with large rural Latino communities, only half (51%) of immigrants own homes, compared with three quarters (74 %) of native-born residents (Bump, Lowell, and Petterson 2005). In addition, they are far more likely to live in overcrowded conditions (Parrado & Kandel 2006).

**2. Economic Security** depends on full-time employment with living wages and benefits. While labor force participation rates of immigrant Latinos exceed those of native-born residents, immigrants experience more inconsistent employment spells because many industries in which they concentrate offer unstable, seasonal, or part-time employment. In rural areas, 32% of Mexican immigrants have household incomes below poverty, over twice the rate of 14% for native-born rural residents (Donato, Tolbert, and Nucci 2005). Among employed adults, 46% of immigrant workers have employer-sponsored health insurance, compared to 59% of native-born workers (Fix, Zimmerman, and Passel 2001). Furthermore, undocumented immigrants and

recent legal immigrants are ineligible for public health insurance in most states (Zimmermann and Tumlin 1999).

Low-wage work among immigrants is closely tied to their low educational attainment and limited English proficiency. Over the past two decades the income of full-time workers with at least some college education increased, while the income of full-time workers lacking a college education declined (Koball & Douglas-Hall 2004). Nationally, 30 percent of immigrant workers lack a high school degree, and three quarters of all workers without a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education are immigrants. Two-thirds of low-wage immigrant workers—those earning under twice the minimum wage—lack English proficiency, and the majority lack a high school degree (Capps et al. 2003). Some research indicates that lack of English proficiency is more closely linked with poverty in immigrant families than either legal status or U.S. experience (Capps & Fix 2002).

**3. Civic Incorporation** is conceptualized as acquiring skills and status that incorporate immigrants into public life in their new communities in the United States. Possibilities for civic incorporation are wide-ranging; however, we will focus on two key indicators: acquiring English language skills and becoming a U.S. citizen. Acquiring English language skills is important not only for immigrants' success in the job market but also for their integration into public life (Borjas 2000; Chiswick & Miller 1999). Community leaders and organizations facilitating immigrant integration commonly cite language barriers between long-term residents and immigrant newcomers as sources of tension, particularly in communities with rapidly growing immigrant populations (Bach 1993). Language barriers also often prevent immigrants from seeking or receiving benefits and services such as health care and food assistance (Holcomb et al. 2003).

Becoming a citizen gives immigrants more security, stability, and opportunities for integration, for instance through the right to vote (Fix, Passel & Sucher 2003). However, under current law many recent immigrants cannot apply for citizenship because they lack legal permanent residency. Yet, even when immigrants are not citizens or cannot become citizens due to lack of legal status, many have U.S. born children. Over three quarters of children of immigrants are U.S.-born citizens, and this share exceeds 90% for pre-school age children (Capps et al. 2004). As a result, the majority of immigrant families with children include at least one non-citizen parent and at least one U.S. born citizen child (Fix & Zimmermann 1999). Many of these “mixed status” families have undocumented parents and citizen children; in such families children may have greater opportunity for long-term integration than the parents.

**4. Family Formation.** First-time Latino immigrants in new destination states continue to be mostly young and male, yet over time, they form their own families, either through reunification with spouses and children from their home country or by marrying and having children in the United States. Having children facilitates the integration process because parents are less likely to move from a community where children are enrolled in public school, and are also more likely to interact with community members in public arenas (Bach 1993).

## **Research Questions**

In this paper, we address the following two research questions:

- 1) **How does the integration of Latino immigrants in rural areas of new destination states compare to other areas?**
- 2) **How does the integration of Latino immigrants in rural areas of new destination states compare to native born residents of rural areas?**

Based on our literature review, we use Public Use Micro Survey (PUMS) 5 percent sample data from the 2000 Decennial Census to examine measures of residential permanence, economic security, civic incorporation, and family formation of immigrants by residence. First, we compare integration measures of rural Latino immigrants in new destination states to rural Latino immigrants in traditional destination states and in metropolitan areas. Second, we examine the integration of immigrants in rural areas, relative to native born residents, comparing across traditional and new destination states.

### **Data and Methods**

Datasets on immigrants in rural areas are limited, and some scholars note that recent surveys of immigrants do not provide the geographic information necessary to identify rural areas (Martin 2005). The decennial Census, with its large sample size, is generally considered the best available data on rural immigrants. Furthermore, in 2000, the Census Bureau greatly increased their outreach efforts in communities with hard to enumerate populations, such as recent immigrants (Citro, Cork & Norwood 2003).

The Census data include the necessary information to identify Latino immigrants, including questions about respondents' place of birth, Latino ethnicity, and metropolitan status. We restrict data to individuals who are of working age, between 16 and 64. Traditional destination states for rural Latino immigration, located in the Southwest, include Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado (Kandel & Cromartie 2004). The remaining states are considered new destination states for the analysis. We use the following measures of integration in the Census 2000 data to operationalize the four integration factors described above.

### **1. Residential Permanence**

- Home Ownership: immigrant owns the home in which s/he lives.

### **2. Economic Security**

- Poverty: total family income versus the Federal poverty level.
- Full-Time Work: working greater than 1750 hours per year (at least 35 hours per week for 50 weeks per year).

### **3. Civic Incorporation**

- Linguistic Isolation: no household member over age 13 speaks English very well.
- Citizenship: immigrant is a U.S. citizen.

### **4. Family Formation**

- Own Children in Household: immigrant lives with his or her own children.

## **Results**

Table 1 compares the characteristics of Latino immigrants in rural areas of new destination states, rural areas of traditional destination states, and metropolitan areas. Latino immigrants in rural areas of new destination states tend to be younger, they have lived in the United States for less time, and they are more likely to be male than are immigrants in rural areas in traditional destination states or in metropolitan areas. However, they are less likely to be born in Mexico than are immigrants in rural areas of traditional destination states. Their education levels are similar to Latino immigrants in rural areas of traditional destination states, but lower than in metropolitan areas.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Latino immigrants by residence**

|                            | NEW<br>RURAL<br>(N=27,585) | TRADITIONAL<br>RURAL<br>(N=19,121) | ALL<br>METROPOLITAN<br>(N=514,277) |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
|                            |                            | <i>Percent</i>                     |                                    |
| BORN IN MEXICO             | 79                         | 96                                 | 63                                 |
| LENGTH OF TIME IN U.S.     |                            |                                    |                                    |
| <i>5 years or less</i>     | 37                         | 19                                 | 24                                 |
| <i>6 to 10 years</i>       | 22                         | 17                                 | 19                                 |
| <i>More than 10 years</i>  | 41                         | 65                                 | 57                                 |
| EDUCATION                  |                            |                                    |                                    |
| <i>Less than 9th grade</i> | 44                         | 47                                 | 35                                 |
| <i>9th to 12th grade</i>   | 20                         | 18                                 | 17                                 |
| <i>12th grade or more</i>  | 36                         | 34                                 | 48                                 |
| AGE                        |                            |                                    |                                    |
| <i>16-24</i>               | 29                         | 18                                 | 20                                 |
| <i>25-44</i>               | 57                         | 55                                 | 57                                 |
| <i>45-64</i>               | 14                         | 27                                 | 22                                 |
| MALE                       | 63                         | 53                                 | 54                                 |

Source: Census 2000, 5% PUMS

Note: Restricted to Latino immigrants ages 16-64.

Table 2 shows the percent of Latino immigrants experiencing each integration measure by residence. Reflective of the shorter length of time in the United States, Latino immigrants in new destination areas are less likely to own a home, more likely to be linguistically isolated, less likely to be a citizen, and less likely to live with their own child in the household than are Latino immigrants in rural areas in traditional destination states or in metropolitan areas. Relative to Latino immigrants in rural areas of traditional destination states, immigrants in new destination states are slightly more likely to be employed full-time and less likely to be poverty, perhaps reflecting better economic opportunities.

**TABLE 2: Integration measures for Latino immigrants, by residence**

|                                 | NEW<br>RURAL<br>(N=27,585) | TRADITIONAL<br>RURAL<br>(N=19,121) | ALL<br>METROPOLITAN<br>(N=514,277) |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
|                                 | <i>Percent</i>             |                                    |                                    |
| OWNS A HOME                     | 38                         | 60                                 | 41                                 |
| IN POVERTY                      | 28                         | 31                                 | 22                                 |
| EMPLOYED FULL-TIME <sup>A</sup> | 60                         | 58                                 | 62                                 |
| LINGUISTICALLY ISOLATED         | 49                         | 37                                 | 39                                 |
| CITIZEN                         | 21                         | 31                                 | 27                                 |
| LIVES WITH OWN CHILD            | 48                         | 63                                 | 54                                 |

Source: Census 2000, 5% PUMS.

Note: Restricted to Latino immigrants ages 16-64.

A: Employed full-time includes only respondents currently in the labor force

Table 3 presents odds ratios from a logistic regression analysis of differences in integration outcomes across three kinds of residence locations. Metropolitan area immigrants serve as the reference category for two groups: immigrants in new rural destination states and those in traditional destination states. Measures of integration include home ownership, poverty, full-time employment, linguistic isolation, citizenship and living with one's own child in a household. Control variables, the results for which are not shown, include age, nativity, U.S. experience, education, and gender.

These results present a mixed, but not unexpected, portrait of Latino immigrants in new and traditional rural destinations, with U.S. experience apparently explaining most differences between the two groups. Compared with their metropolitan counterparts, all rural Latinos are more likely to own homes, although those living in traditional destination states of the Southwest have a clear advantage, owing most likely to greater U.S. experience. Rural Latino immigrants, on the other hand, are poorer than metro Latino immigrants, a result that can only be partially attributed to full-time employment. That rural Latino immigrants in both traditional and new destinations have greater odds of being citizens is particularly revealing and suggests that a large

proportion of groups in both locations may have migrated internally from urban U.S. destinations where they acquired substantial work and living experience. Finally, those persons with greater U.S. experience, more established employment and who own homes may be more likely to form families in the United States, as is the case for rural Latino immigrants in rural traditional destinations.

**Table 3: Odds ratios for logistic regression results, relative to metropolitan Latino immigrants**

| OUTCOME VARIABLES                 | INPUT VARIABLES OF INTEREST |                    |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
|                                   | RURAL, NEW                  | RURAL, TRADITIONAL |
| OWNS HOUSE                        | 1.14**                      | 1.95**             |
| POVERTY                           | 1.13**                      | 1.38**             |
| EMPLOYED FULL-TIME <sup>A</sup>   | 1.05**                      | .89**              |
| LINGUISTICALLY ISOLATED           | 1.12**                      | .88**              |
| CITIZEN                           | 1.16**                      | 1.43**             |
| LIVES WITH OWN CHILD IN HOUSEHOLD | .96**                       | 1.23**             |

Source: Census 2000, 5% PUMS.

Note: Includes controls for length of time in U.S., sex, birthplace, educational attainment, and age. Restricted to Latino immigrants, ages 16-64

A Employed full-time includes only respondents in the labor force

\*\* Significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.

Our last analysis highlights the positive influence of new destination states for fostering immigrant integration according to the measures we consider in our analysis. It takes a slightly different approach by modeling four integration outcomes for all *rural* residents, including native born (Table 4). Controls include residence in a new destination state, nativity broken out by years of U.S. experience (versus the reference category of native born residents), educational attainment, age, and gender. Although we did not include linguistic isolation and citizenship as explanatory variables, we plan to include these two variables in future analyses.

**Table 4: Odds ratios from logistic regression results of immigrant integration outcomes, all rural residents (N=2,172,020)**

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLES                           | MEASURES OF INTEGRATION OUTCOMES |         |                                 |                      |
|---|----------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
|   | OWNS HOME                        | POVERTY | EMPLOYED FULL-TIME <sup>A</sup> | LIVES WITH OWN CHILD |
| New Destination State                           | 1.24**                           | .79**   | 1.15**                          | 1.03**               |
| Native Born (ref)                               | --                               | --      | --                              | --                   |
| Latino Immigrant w/less than 5 yrs in U.S.      | .42**                            | 1.33**  | 1.00                            | 1.82**               |
| Latino Immigrant w/6-10 yrs in U.S.             | .75**                            | 1.03    | 1.17**                          | 2.38**               |
| Latino Immigrant w/11+ yrs in U.S.              | 1.06**                           | .95     | .98                             | 3.31**               |
| New Dest. State * Latino Imm. w/less than 5 yrs | .40**                            | .98     | .95                             | .39**                |
| New Dest. State * Latino Imm. w/6-10 yrs        | .41**                            | .94     | 1.12                            | .69**                |
| New Dest. State * Latino Imm. w/11+ yrs         | .48**                            | 1.04    | 1.06                            | .63**                |
| Less than 9th grade (ref)                       | --                               | --      | --                              | --                   |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> to 12th grade – no diploma      | 1.84**                           | .45**   | .90**                           | .93**                |
| High school diploma or higher                   | 1.87**                           | .26**   | 2.17**                          | 1.35**               |
| Ages 16 to 24                                   | .62**                            | 1.80**  | .19**                           | .09**                |
| Ages 25 to 44 (ref)                             | --                               | --      | --                              | --                   |
| Ages 45 to 64                                   | 2.36**                           | .68**   | .98**                           | .27**                |
| Female  | 1.07**                           | 1.16**  | .36**                           | 1.51**               |

Source: Census 2000, 5% PUMS.

Note: Restricted to individuals living in rural areas, ages 16-64

A: Employed full-time includes only respondents currently in the labor force

\*\* Significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.

All residents in new immigrant destination states are significantly more likely to own homes, less likely to be in poverty, and more likely to be employed full-time, an indication of the economic vibrancy that attracts immigrants in the first place. Recent Latino immigrants in rural areas experience lower rates of home ownership and higher poverty rates, while full-time employment rates are equal to or higher than native born rural residents among recent Latino immigrants. With longer stays in the United States, poverty and homeownership rates converge with those of native born. Latino immigrants living here for more than 5 years are indistinguishable from their native-born rural counterparts in terms of poverty rates; for home ownership, the experience requirement is closer to 10 years.

Yet, the steady progression into homeownership by Latino immigrants does not apply to those residing in new destination states, where, as shown by the significant interaction term, the odds of owning a home are halved (among Latino immigrants in new destination states) regardless of how long they have lived in the United States. We expect that this outcome highlights the distinction between the level of U.S. experience that rural Latino immigrants have in new destination states compared to traditional destination states. Ethnographic research on new immigrant destinations suggests that many recent arrivals have substantial experience in traditional urban and rural immigrant destinations prior to moving to new destination areas (Hernández León and Zúñiga 2000; Fennelly 2005). Consequently, it is not unreasonable to expect that this outcome results from lack of experience in the new destination community. Other results shown in Table 4 support this explanation. For instance, residing in new immigrant destination states for Latino immigrants has no bearing on two other economic outcomes, poverty or full-time employment, but it substantially reduces the odds of living with a child, another indicator of residential stability. Future analyses will employ a variable that measures length of residence in current location to confirm this expectation.

Other results conform to our expectations. Relative to the lowest education level of less than 9<sup>th</sup> grade, higher education is associated with home ownership, reduced poverty, full-time employment and living with a child. The latter two outcomes are unaffected by the distinction between less than 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade education, a result we attribute to the disadvantaged status of workers lacking a high school diploma. Results for the age variables illustrate the benefit of age for home ownership and lower odds of being poor, and it also signals the primacy of the 25 to 44 age group for family formation. Rural women have higher odds of experiencing poverty, most likely the result of single family household status for which no

controls were included in this analysis. In rural areas, females are significantly more likely to live with a child, which may be related to females lower likelihood of full-time employment.

## **Discussion**

Rapid, unexpected, and recent Latino population growth in rural areas has helped to focus public attention on immigration reform and fostered a mostly qualitative literature on immigration to new rural destinations. Results presented in this paper represent our first attempts to quantify the process of Latino immigrant integration in rural areas of new destination states. In our analyses, we compare a set of outcomes which previous studies have used to indicate economic, social, and civic incorporation for foreign-born Latinos in new rural, traditional rural, and urban destinations.

We are particularly interested in the experience of Latino immigrants in new rural destinations and find that they are ethnically more diverse, demographically more disadvantaged, and seemingly more attached to countries of origin by virtue of more limited U.S. experience. Nevertheless, descriptive results indicate that Latino immigrants in new rural destinations fare the same or slightly better on several indicators such as home ownership, full-time employment, and household structure than do their metropolitan counterparts. Demographic controls in a logistic regression framework reduce some but not all differences in integration measures. We find that all rural areas are associated with higher rates of home ownership, citizenship, and poverty for Latino immigrants, compared with urban areas.

In light of public debates over the ability of less-educated and low-skilled immigrants to adapt and integrate into American society, it is telling that our multivariate results indicate a clear and monotonic correlation between increasing levels of U.S. experience and improvements

in measures of integration for Latino immigrants. This particular trend occurs far more gradually for Latino immigrants in new rural destinations, but it arguably still occurs.

Our analysis has clear limitations. A range of characteristics may affect Latino immigrant integration in rural areas but at this stage, we were only able to include a limited number of controls that might explain integration outcomes. Moreover, different types of immigrants may be more attracted to rural areas than urban areas, raising the potential analytic challenge of self-selection bias resulting from distinctly different types of immigrants moving to rural areas. Some integration measures, particularly family formation, moving, and educational attainment, may occur prior to moving to a rural area. However, other measures of integration, such as homeownership, employment, income, and occupation, can be assumed to occur after moving to a particular area. Though the analysis does not determine the direction of causality between place of residence and integration outcomes, it sheds light on whether integration differences persist across place, after controlling for differences in the characteristics of Latino immigrants. We are also acutely aware of the inability of large-scale national surveys such as the decennial census, to accurately capture the size and character of the most recent Latino immigrants, many of whom lack legal documentation to work and live in the United States. This problem is endemic with this difficult-to-reach population, whose members are understandably reticent to participate in formal surveys.

### **Future Research**

These analyses will be expanded in two ways prior to the Population Association of America conference. One, in future analyses we will examine change in integration between 2000 and 2005, using American Community Survey data. Two, we will explore the impact of community characteristics on integration. The characteristics will include measures such as the predominant employment opportunities for Latino immigrants in the area, the recent rate of

Latino immigrant population growth, the relative size of the population of other racial and ethnic groups, and the area's history with immigrant incorporation.

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